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THE HOMESTEAD

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THE HOMESTEAD

BY

ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

AUTHOR OF "GRAIL FIRE," ETC.

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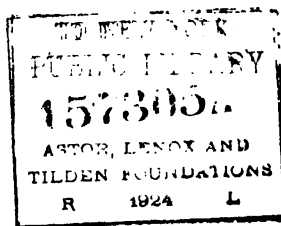
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THE HOMESTEAD

THE HOMESTEAD

I

IT stood well away from the village and back a little among the hills, in Marshall Hollow, to which it had given its family name. It was a sturdy old house, four-square, with a great central chimney and with a deep roof, over which bowed and swayed the branches of two stately elms. Like the trees, it gave the impression of having taken root with the years, until it had become an integral part of its New England setting. It seemed as inevitable a product as the boulders in the pasture beyond the orchard fence.

But, unlike trees and rocks, it was distinctly human. In a sense, it seemed to possess even more of essential humanity than any one of its inhabitants; for individual men and women are but themselves, whereas the Marshall homestead was a whole race.

All old houses have this mysterious knack of gathering up and incorporating the spirit of the lives that have been lived within them. There is no veriest wreck of a shanty that is not obscurely eloquent of love or sorrow. But the Marshall homestead had one advantage over the most of its kind: it had always

been occupied by one family. That is why it gave such an impression of unity, stood so solidly for something, was so emphatically itself. With all its comprehensiveness, it was as decided an individual as the first John Marshall, who built it.

For the Marshalls, again, had one advantage (if it was surely that) over most of the families that made up the little country community: they were all governed by one tradition, father to son had handed down one consistent standard of character and action. Lovers of home and of the soil, citizens in the most peculiar and loyal sense of the word, they had, throughout their six generations, stood for nothing so much as durability.

Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suppose that their house had helped them—once it had taken the hint from the first John Marshall. He was a man of strength and decision, a man to stamp himself on everything he touched. He was thirty when he dug the foundation for the house, and ninety-three when he died; and every night of those sixty-three years he slept in his own bed. The result was that he made short work of uncongenial tendencies, such as all crude new environments are apt to experiment with, and trained his house as inevitably as he trained his wife and children. By the time he died, the family tradition was as well established as if it had started with the flood.

Not that all this was a conscious proceeding. New Englanders like the Marshalls are not given to introspective analysis, and are seldom articulate in their

ideal purposes. But their conviction was all the more profound because it was so unaware of itself, because they none of them ever dreamed of the possibility of departing from it. Permanence and consistency were with them necessary conditions of life.

To an imaginative passerby there was at times something rather oppressive about the look of their house. After all, mortality has evanescence in its blood, and mortal expressions and symbols ought not to look as if they could never change. But oppression was the last thing which the community seemed to receive at the hands of the Marshall homestead. Beneficence, rather, proceeded from it—a kind, wise helpfulness which concerned itself gladly with all the affairs of local government. The first John Marshall was President of the first Board of Trustees of the Church, first Superintendent of Schools, first Selectman. In all the generations succeeding there had never failed to be Marshalls filling public offices. Their policy was always the same; people knew exactly what they were getting when they voted for a Marshall. Conservative, patient, inflexible, absolutely just and entirely sure—so were they, one and all. They succeeded pretty well in constraining the village to one line of progress; so that there was a sense in which the old house, looking serenely down from its hillside, dreaming under its gracious elms, ruled the whole township.

The chief danger to the family tradition had lain among the Marshall mates. Young love cannot always be trusted to know its own good, or to act for

it, if it does know it; and two or three difficult situations had resulted from boyish or girlish recklessness. Young Thomas Marshall had insisted on marrying a frivolous, light-hearted chit of a girl from one of the least considerable families of a negligible hamlet over the mountain. She was utterly incapable of ruling a big establishment, or of appreciating high and serious tradition; and, as Thomas was the eldest of his generation, the outlook was for a time rather dark. But the girl never throve in the grave and purposeful household; and, after a year of gradually waning smiles, she and her baby were carried dead out of the front door. Then Thomas—unreasonably affected—went away for a change of scene, and never came back; typhoid fever took him in some distant town.

Something was wrong with that generation. Prudence Marshall, the next in line, had no sooner come of age than she married a sea captain. Of all things, a sea captain in the Marshall homestead! Very likely he, too, was surprised. He certainly had no idea of deserting his ship when, on a visit to relatives, between cruises, he met Prudence and fell in love with her. But, once he was married, he realized that he had let himself in for a thoroughgoing change.

"Funny how some things get hold of you," he said, years later, to an old comrade whom he ran across on one of his rare trips away from home. "I can't explain how it happened, and very likely it will sound ridiculous to you; but, once that old house had clapped its eye on me, I could no more have gotten

away from it than a harpooned sword fish can get away from you."

By this speech it will be perceived that Barnaby Rogers had a certain whimsical imagination which was indeed a novelty in the Marshall family. The bare facts of his coercion were not at all mysterious. Prudence's mother was dead, and her father was a broken man, physically disabled by a kick from a vicious horse. His daughter was needed at home, and so was her husband. The two of them took one delirious cruise, during which Prudence was pitifully sick and bewildered, staggering helplessly about the decks and cabins when she was not lying prostrate in her bunk; and, after that, Barnaby manfully and humorously gave up his visions of a nautical wife.

"You stay at home next time, darling," he said.

"Yes, please, Barnaby," Prudence assented, with tears in her eyes.

But there was only one more "next time" for Barnaby. He loved Prudence, and he loved the little son who waited for him at the end of his far Eastern trip. Moreover, he felt the claim of the new duties that lay thick around him in the new life to which he had allied himself. Some able-bodied man was needed at the helm of the Marshall farm; who was a more fitting candidate than Prudence's husband? So he gave up his ship, and settled down; and during the rest of his life the house had its way with him.

And yet not entirely. At least, if the outer conformity was complete, there was an inner dissen-

sion, the signs and symbols of which were everywhere: great murmuring shells on the mantelpiece; oriental curios scattered among the worsted mats and daguerreotypes on the parlor table; a sail rigged up in the barnyard to keep the rain from the chicken coops; and, beside the front steps, an anchor which Prudence covered with nasturtiums in the summer, but which, for nine months of the year, lay as stark and conspicuous as Noah's ark on Mount Ararat.

These visible things were disturbing; but they were nothing compared with the hidden strain which Barnaby had, once for all, introduced into the Marshall blood. To be sure, his children were Prudence's, too; and she was all Marshall, a very sedate, home-keeping woman. She soberly trained her son and daughter in the full Marshall tradition, which she unconsciously represented. Nor did her husband gainsay her. He knew what she was doing, for, as has been hinted, he had a trick of analysis; and he good-naturedly let her alone.

"What's the use?" he cogitated sometimes. "Anyway, settled natures are apt to be happier than restless ones. I'd rather have the youngsters stay at home than go knocking about the world."

That did all very well. Barnaby was getting along into middle age when he formulated these sage conclusions. But the crucial question was going to be: what would the youngsters themselves rather have? And it is not for nothing that a sea-change creeps into mountain blood.

The next generation showed little effect of its al-

loy. There were four of them—one son and three daughters—sturdy little Rogerses by name, but equally sturdy little Marshalls by disposition. The son was pure Marshall. He bore the family name in the van, since he could not, like his predecessors, bring up the rear with it. His grandfather saw to this baptismal restitution—a double sort of regeneration—before Barnaby had a chance to get home and express any opinion.

The result was, in time, a steady, grave youth, law-abiding and unadventurous beyond any ancestral precedent. Conservative was a polite epithet for Marshall Rogers; his neighbors called him pig-headed. In truth, it seemed that the family tradition, trying to right itself after its recent vicissitudes, had gone too far. Marshall was almost a monstrosity of steadfastness. Considering, moreover, that he labored under a hopeless handicap in the matter of his name, and that his marriage would mean the handing on of the alien title to sons and grandsons, he could not be regarded as a very satisfactory experiment.

It was on the roof of the homestead that he met his death. He was not agile on his feet, and he should never have climbed up to mend the chimney. His mother remonstrated with him, but he paid no more attention to her than he was accustomed to pay to any one who ever took the trouble to advise him. He simply turned away in silence, and placed his ladder. He made no outcry when he fell, nor did he utter a single complaint during the few days of his agonized fight for life. His eyes were dogged to the

very end. But, alas, poor Marshall! he had met one Force whose advice was a command. His father, Barnaby, wiping rare tears from his manly eyes on the evening after the funeral, did not see how the present and future void was going to be filled.

But young men are plentiful in this fertile world; and, as one took his eternal departure, another approached through the spring twilight. Hester Rogers sat on the front steps. She had lately learned to sit there, instead of roaming the evening meadows as had once been her wont. She did not tell herself that her cousin, young Henry Marshall, from the far West, had anything to do with her change of habit; but probably that was because she did not wisely or thoroughly investigate her girlish heart.

He was only her third cousin. His father had been born in Dakota, and none of his generation had ever set foot in Vermont. But his father's grandfather was the youngest son of an unusually large family in the Marshall homestead; and he had gone West simply because he had felt himself, in a way, crowded out. He had wanted to live a man's life, and had not found room for it at home. He had cherished the memories of his birthplace, handing them down to his children, who, in turn, had instructed his grandchildren; so that the Marshall tradition had not died out by transplanting, but had taken new root and had put forth new bloom of the peculiar color and fragrance of the legendary. No Dakota Marshall but understood the exact location and aspect of the Vermont homestead.

Finally Henry Marshall declared his intention of returning to New England.

"Oh! I guess not to stay," he added, when he caught the glance which his brothers and sisters turned upon him. "I just want to see how the old place looks."

"I tell you, Hester," he said, however, as he sat by his young cousin's side on the steps during those spring twilights of which mention has been made, "I tell you, it's a great thing to come home, home where you belong."

"Don't I belong here? May I stay? Are you going to be willing to let me stay?" he ventured one evening; and, at her reply, the two of them got up and disappeared under the shadow of the trees beyond the house.

This was a wonderful consummation. For Hester was the second child of Prudence and Barnaby, and therefore, since Marshall's death, the heir to the homestead. Nothing could be more desirable than that she should marry a Marshall and thus re-establish the family name on its rightful ground.

He was a splendid young Marshall, too. Never a finer had tossed hay in the meadows or pruned the apple trees. His father-in-law handed over much of the farm's direction to him at once; and ended by submitting himself entirely to the younger and more vigorous ideas. Henry had western methods which proved highly successful on New England soil. Also he had spontaneous enthusiasm, whereas Barnaby had never had anything but a faithful sense of duty towards his wife's patrimonial acres. The re-

sult was a stirring and quickening throughout the whole place, outside and in. Barns were pulled down and re-built, instead of being tinkered and patched. Neighboring land was bought over; old trees were cut down and new ones set out; new crops were planted in meadows which had gone half asleep, repeating the old monotonous sequence of timothy and potatoes and corn. Not in decades had the farm known such an awakening. Only the house itself was not touched, save to receive a fresh coat of paint. Henry would not listen even to his wife's suggestion that he should add a new side piazza.

"No, no, Hester! We mustn't change the house; it's got too much character."

Hester also submitted completely to her husband's decisions. That was doubly natural in her, since she adored him, and since every one submitted to him. Only once in her life did she disconcert him, and that was in the early years of their marriage. Her father, Barnaby, had announced his intention of going away for a little trip.

"Guess I'd like to see how a ship feels again," he said jocularly one evening, after he had, for several days, puzzled his wife and disturbed his daughter by wandering restlessly about the garden, paying more attention to the old anchor than to the tasks with which he might presumably have allayed his restlessness. "There's no reason why I shouldn't go, now that Henry's got the farm so well in hand. Come along, Prudence; put on your bonnet and shawl, and let's start for Marseilles."

Of course Prudence gasped and turned pale. Her feet—more solid than ever with the weight of her fifty-odd years—felt again the swaying of the deck, and involuntarily she put out her hand and clutched the reassuring edge of the kitchen table. But Hester sprang to her feet and caught her father's arm.

"Oh, father, do it!" she cried. "I have always wished you would, and would take me with you. I'll go with you now, if you'll let me. I'll have to take Barbara too, of course; but she's such a good baby, she won't be in the way. Henry! Mother! You won't mind, will you? We'll be back in a few weeks."

Whether they minded or not, they consented, looking at Hester's transfigured face and then at each other with startled eyes.

"Best way to cure her," said Henry later, when his mother-in-law waylaid him in the barnyard and took anxious counsel with him. "It cured you, didn't it?"

The pertinent question was unanswerable except by an analysis of which Prudence was not capable. But she obscurely felt the difference between her own old passive departure, swept off her feet by love, and this volitional act of her daughter's, setting herself against love for the sake of some other prompting of her nature.

Henry was right, however: the trip did cure Hester. Not in the way in which her mother had been cured. She gloried in the ship's motion, the life of the sea; she and her baby were everywhere about the swinging decks, never in any one's way, but always

where the free ecstasy of existence might be felt to the full.

"Gad! I'd know she was a sailor's lass," said one of her father's old comrades, watching her hold little shouting Barbara up to receive a flying bath of spray. "Born and bred on a farm? Say, Barnaby, that's a fairy tale, ain't it?"

Barnaby was in the seventh heaven. He and Hester had always been peculiarly close friends, and now she seemed to give him the very wine of comradeship. But his content did not last long. Before they had been out ten days (their vessel was a slow sailing schooner), a cloud obscured his daughter's radiance; and, instead of springing about the decks, she took to leaning and gazing back at the western horizon.

"It's Henry, father," she explained, when he came and stood beside her. "I'm homesick; I want him. Oh! you and the sea have claimed me too late. I'm sorry, and I'm glad."

He took her home by a fast steamer; and that was the last of his nautical experiments with the women of his family.

Barnaby died at an earlier age than was quite customary with the masters of the Marshall homestead. Perhaps that was because, since Hester's marriage, he had not been really master, and the place had not needed him. Had it ever needed him? Only as a mere man, the possessor of muscles and sinews, useful for work. As an individual, he had been more of a disturbance than a blessing. He was not sorry to go. He lay, smiling, on his bed, facing the eastern light.

"Hester," he whispered, "do you think I might see Barbara once more? I don't look very bad, do I?"

Barbara was six years old, already deep in the eyes and firm in the mouth—a strong, sweet little girl. She loved her grandfather dearly, yet she did not cry as she stood beside him. She even returned his smile. He put out his hand and drew her closer, fumbling under his pillow with his other hand.

"That's it. Thank you, lass. It's for you. Your grand-daddy's first compass. I had it when I was a boy. It's small, but it's true. It'll guide you safe. It's——"

But his breath failed him; he broke off and lay, smiling at her.

She never forgot that moment. When she was a woman it stood up out of the mists of her childhood like a headland touched by the sun. She was always glad to remember that she had then and there pulled a blue ribbon out of her pocket and had tied the compass about her neck, slipping it down inside the low collar of her childish frock.

"That's right. Safe sailing to you, lass."

Then her mother had come in and led her away.

After her husband's death, Prudence moved into a little cottage belonging to the Marshall farm. Henry and Hester remonstrated with her, but she was firm. Neither would she listen to the requests of her other married children that she come and live with them. Perhaps she was happier, living alone. She had her memories.

Then the old homestead gave itself over to the en-

joyment of a period that equaled, almost transcended, any that it had known. The Marshall stock was in fruitage again—lusty, vigorous. To be sure, there were only three babies to lie in the old cradle and tumble about the old, uneven floors; and the second son died in infancy. But Barbara and Reuben were sturdy; and Henry, their father, was a generation in himself. Not only did his skill with the farm amount to genius, but he was also capable in civic affairs. He had not been in the homestead a year before he was appointed to office; and by the time he was forty, no board or committee that ever took shape thought itself complete without him.

Those were great days for the old house. Its windows shone with benevolence, the warm heart of its chimney glowed, its deep roof and strong walls sheltered its inmates very tenderly. Now and then in the twilight Barbara thought (she had inherited her grandfather's trick of thinking things) that she heard it singing a low song of content, the song of one who has travailed and feared, who has held to its standard in the face of much danger and difficulty, who has persisted, and who, at the last, has conquered happily. Then she was apt to lay her cheek against the square pillar beside which she sat on the front steps, and to draw a long, deep sigh.

II

IT is not on the front steps, however, that our story begins to concern itself seriously with Barbara. Rather, it is on the top of a hill, facing the sunset.

She had been out all day, and her face had the wide, self-forgetful look which comes from long, intimate intercourse with the wind and sky. Her hair was blown about her forehead, and her cheeks were flushed. She was too young—barely twenty—and too used to life in the open to feel tired now; but when she gained the crest of the hill she stood erect for a moment and then allowed herself to sink down at the foot of a great gray rock where, with her hands clasped about her knees, she gave herself over to meditation.

She was a girl worth pausing to look at—if any observer had been in that lonely place. Rather tall, largely built, with a certain sweep in the curves of her strong young body which suggested the contours of her native hills. Her hair was dark and wayward, submitting perforce to the thick braids in which she bound it about her head, but escaping over her forehead and ears. Her eyes, however, were blue. They surprised one who had never seen them before, and sometimes even the people who had seen her many times, they lay so deep and quiet in her vivid face.

If it had not been for them, her expression would have been one of impetuous eagerness. As it was, she seemed to be ever arresting herself and commenting admonishingly on her own impulses. Her hands and mouth were firm and sweet, very womanly tender; and yet what a spring there was to the arch of the one, and what a swift grasp to the others! There was some contradiction in Barbara Marshall, something that was going to give her trouble as she grew older.

Perhaps it was giving her trouble already; for, after all, twenty is womanhood. She certainly looked rather grave as she sat on her sunset hill. But, no; she was only subdued by her long day. She gave a sigh, nestled back against her rock, and began to sing softly to herself. The wide world lay at her feet, with the sun dropping slowly down over it. The wide sky was overhead, preparing its stars. Ah! What a good wide universe! She stopped singing as abruptly as she had begun; and, stretching her arms up over her head, lay back bodily upon the warm rock. There she was lying, gazing up into the sky, when William Sloan came up the hill and found her.

He came more slowly than she (she had arrived with a leap and a bound), for he was older and less impetuous. A sober farmer of thirty-two is not likely to spring up hillsides at supper-time. He stopped short when he saw her, pulled his hat from his head, wiped his forehead, and stood looking at her unconscious face with a quizzical smile. Then when she saw him (for her senses were too delicately trained by her

experience in woods and fields to let her remain long unconscious of his presence), and sat up to greet him, he came and dropped on the grass by her side.

Neither of them spoke for a moment. They looked at each other, he with the same quizzical smile which his first sight of her had called forth, she with a curious sort of defiance, in which laughter lurked. From their long, steady regard, it appeared that they were tried friends, understanding each other.

"William!" she said at last. "Aren't you ashamed? I'm grown up now."

"Quite sure, Barbara?"

The man turned and pulled some packages from the wide pockets of his loose coat; then he stretched himself on the grass, with his hands behind his head. Barbara looked down steadily into his smiling eyes.

"You're tired," she murmured regretfully. "Well, it's your own fault; you needn't have come. Are those sandwiches, William?"

Her voice had three separate moods in this little speech.

"Yes, and sponge cake." William put out one hand and guarded the packages. "Also some cream cheese. But you're not to have a bite until you have given account of yourself. You grown up? You're a child!"

"Oh, William!" Barbara clasped her hands about her knees and threw back her head, looking off at the western horizon toward which the sun was hastening. "Don't scold. It isn't like you. You understand."

"Well, perhaps I did understand, years ago, when you had every right to be a child. But now I had really supposed it was true that you were growing up."

"Well——" She thought of defending herself. Then her mood veered again. "William, mayn't I have just one sandwich?" she ventured meekly.

William laughed, and tossed all the packages into her lap. Swiftly and approvingly she opened them, spread their contents on the rock, and proceeded to serve the informal meal.

"It's like old times, isn't it, William? (My! your mother does make good cheese.) Aren't you rather glad I did it? Come, now, aren't you, really?"

William lifted his eyebrows above his smiling mouth and, without looking up, leaned over to help himself to cheese.

"I've been in the cornfield all day," he said; "and it's a long walk up here."

Barbara hesitated. Her face fell a little, as if, for all her long acquaintance with him, she was not sure that, this time, he might not be in earnest.

"William!" she coaxed. "I think I could still find you a bird's nest, or a fairy ring, or something. I'll go right away and hunt."

"No," declined William politely. "Thank you; but you see, I really am grown up. Moreover, I don't want to move."

He stretched himself more comfortably on the short, warm grass.

Barbara was silent a moment. William knew how

to tease her so well that now he had succeeded in calling a tentative look of dismay into her face.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "perhaps you never cared very much about fairy rings, after all. William, surely you haven't forgotten——"

Her voice rang appealingly.

He looked up at her and smiled, dismissing the bantering mood with which he had gone far enough. His eyes took their turn at letting friendship shine fully and simply from them.

"No, of course not!" he reassured her; and it was evident that his memory held some precious scenes.

Then he went on eating his sponge cake, and silence fell between them.

"William."

It had been a long silence. The sun had sunk below the horizon, and the level clouds had received his parting benediction, and passed it on to a hushed and waiting world. In the east the face of the full moon had begun to gather light. Barbara had sat in meditation, not precisely in reverie. She was too active a nature to dream, though she might see visions.

"William, did they send you after me to-day; or is mother worrying now?"

The subtle—perhaps unconscious—compliment of that "or" did not escape William, and he glanced acknowledgment of it. But he also detected an equivocal implication to repudiate.

"Do you think I'd let you stay lingering here," he said somewhat sternly, "if your mother were worrying about you? No, they sent word to me an hour

or two ago; and then they went down to the village to the church sociable."

"William, I'm sorry; really I am," Barbara confessed, her blue eyes rueful and deprecating underneath her swift eyebrows. "Perhaps you wanted to go to the sociable."

"I? Now, Barbara, you know better. I was only planning to have a good hot supper at home, and then to read until bedtime."

"William! You're teasing me."

"Yes, child, of course I am. I'm all right. I like it up here. I'm really rather obliged to you for the excuse. But you can't keep it up all your life, you know; for I'm getting old, and I'll soon be too stiff to climb after you."

"I haven't the least idea why I did it to-day." She brought her eyes back from the sunset, and bent them earnestly on her companion, taking counsel with him and herself. "I didn't know I was going to do it. I started out after strawberries, and then I couldn't stop climbing, and then—I've been to the very top of West Mountain," she confessed, laughing.

"Feel any better?"

William received the news of her far departure with a philosophical lift of the eyebrows.

"Lots!" She gave him a glance of gratitude for his intelligence. "I'm not quite ready yet to go home, but pretty nearly."

"Well, Barbara, I don't often advise you, do I?" He paused to win her accord, and she gave it, "No, William," wholeheartedly. "But I'm going to ask

you now why you don't try working off your spirits in the kitchen. You're a full-grown woman; you have duties; you——"

"William!" She cut him short. There was a note of entreaty in her voice, and actual tears stood in her eyes. "Don't preach to me! I can't stand it!"

Well as he knew her, he was taken aback by her stress. He looked at her silently. Then he changed his admonition into a laugh.

"Hold on, Barbara! There's nothing tragic about it. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"Oh, William! you don't know"—Barbara accepted his readjustment of the situation, and returned his laugh—"you have no idea what it means to me that you understand. Nobody else does. I don't half understand, myself; but you do, and that is a bulwark."

William continued to study her face for a moment, with a curious little wistful gleam in the corner of his eye. Then he sighed and said:

"Very well, I take back my sermon. But if you should ever remember it and care to know the text, you can find it somewhere in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians."

Barbara rose. Her motion was not apparently due to anything William had said; she had seemed to pay scant attention to him since her last remonstrance. She had a far-away, listening look, as of one who hears some tide of the spirit turn.

"Let's go home," she said, quite irrelevantly—

though, of course, the suggestion might have been a very pertinent acquiescence.

William rose too. He did not flatter himself that the girl's expression and action had anything to do with his recent exhortation. On how many hillsides had he not seen the same expression come over her face, and heard the same words voice it! For the last five minutes he had, indeed, been watching for the change, anticipating the turn of the tide which his experience had taught him was almost due. He glanced at his comrade and smiled to see how, as he phrased it to himself, her eyes had now got the better of her mouth. In her contradictory face one feature had folded its springing lines into an almost wistful submission; and the blue lakes over them were swept clear—wide, watchful, dominant.

"All right, Barbara!"

He made haste to gather up the remains of the supper and thrust them into his pockets; for he knew that Barbara's eyes had no more mercy, brooked no more delay, than her mouth. Her returnings were always as imperious as her departures.

"Wait just a minute."

But, no, she was gone, vanishing under the arch of the wood path that led down the mountain side. He started to follow her at a run; then thought better of his impulse, and settled down to a sober though agile gait that kept her just within ear-shot. After all, he was twelve years older than she, and of a much graver nature. He was not going to career down the hillside like a distracted boulder in her wake.

Anyway! He smiled as he felt the almost tangible end of the cord by which he held her, the need of him which would presently bring her to a full stop, waiting for him. She had never yet, after a runaway day, been able to face her home without his reinforcement.

Sure enough: at the point where the path burst out of the woods and stopped short on the edge of a high open field, he came up with Barbara, and she laid her hand arrestingly on his arm.

"Come along!" he said, as she hung back.

"William, I'm really afraid," she laughed.

"Nonsense!" He pulled her forward.

On the outer edge of the woods they stood for a moment, full in the face of the evening valley. It was almost dark. Far down below them the fields lay dim and blurred in the moon-mingled shadows. Across the way from them the mountains rose, dusky and gigantic. The night was silent. An owl called in the woods behind, and a few insects were beginning to take up the burden of their symphony. But these rhythmic sounds only deepened the hush of the hills and valley. At wide, scattered intervals, farmhouse lights shone through the darkness. Among them the windows of the Marshall homestead sent forth a watchful ray. Barbara's eyes sought her home at once. She knew exactly where to look for it, and she received its unfaltering salutation with a sigh.

She said nothing further, nor did she stop again, as she and William descended the hill. But when they stood in the heavily shadowed front yard of

the homestead, with the great dark bulk of the house looming before them, they paused once more, with mutual, tacit consent. The light that had found Barbara on the hill had issued from the kitchen windows, and the front of the house was in darkness. Only the surface of its window-panes glinted and gleamed in the moonlight which stole through the branches of the trees. There was something very disconcerting in the blank scrutiny of those baffling eyes. No wonder Barbara felt herself in the presence of embodied disapproval.

III

THE light in the kitchen had been kindled by Barbara's brother, Reuben, two years younger than she. He sat beside it, studying an agricultural journal. The great room around him was mysterious with lurking shadows, with fathomless suggestions of things that could not be there, yet that had been there once, and—who knows?—might yet be again. The whole past and future of the old house lay outside the circle of the young man's lamp. But, within it, lay only the present—precise, clearly defined, and emphatic. Reuben was one of the most practical Marshalls that had ever lived.

He looked up composedly when his sister and her companion entered the door. Doubtless he had heard the creaking of the gate.

"Ah, William!"

He rose and extended his hand to his neighbor, giving him a straightforward glance. But his eyes paused coldly on Barbara's face, then turned away.

"I'm ashamed to say how much we thank you," he continued. "I thought we'd got through needing this kind of help from you."

"Reuben!"

Even a calmer nature than Barbara's would have rebelled at the cool young ironical voice.

"Reuben! Just as if I were a helpless child! Don't you suppose I knew the way home? I was coming when William found me."

"Children aren't helpless; that isn't the trouble," stated her brother dispassionately. "It's that they can't be trusted."

"Oh, come now, Reuben!" William had intended to leave Barbara at the door; but, seeing that she still had need of him, he came forward into the room. "Don't make something out of nothing."

"Nothing?" Reuben shrugged his shoulders. "I guess you wouldn't have thought it was nothing if you'd seen the state mother was in. She had a lot of ironing on hand, and was counting on Barbara to help her. Then she was worried, too. Barbara hasn't any excuse any longer for running away. I've never seen mother in such a state."

"But she went to the sociable, Reuben."

Barbara's transient vexation was gone. She had been all ready for full penitence, as she had entered the door; and the reminder of her neglected duties and the news of her mother's anxiety smote her.

"Father made her. He said he had to go anyway—he'd promised to see a man there—and he wasn't going to leave her hanging over the gate and running to the turn in the road and fretting herself sick."

"Oh, dear me!" Barbara caught her breath. "William, come on with me down to the village. I must find her at once."

But even as she spoke, wheels were heard on the

rough mountain road, and a woman's voice called from the darkness,

"Reuben! Has Barbara come back?"

"Mother!" Barbara sprang from the doorway, ran to the slowly approaching carriage, put up both hands, and clasped her mother's arm. "I'm here, dear; and, oh! I'm so sorry! I didn't realize."

"Get away from the wheel, Barbara." It was her father's voice that answered her, though her mother's hands prevented her from obeying him. "You don't have to break your leg just because you've been a naughty girl. Well, there now, take your mother in and get her some supper. She wouldn't eat a thing at the sociable."

"Let me put up your horse for you, Mr. Marshall."

William stepped forward from the shadow, where he had taken refuge from what seemed likely to be a family "scene." With all his experience in mediation he had never learned not to shrink from the embarrassing intimacy which the office entailed; and he now made one hopeful effort at complete escape. But Barbara stopped him.

"Oh, William, no! Father, send Reuben!"

There were two sorts of appeal and confidence in this speech, the one seeming somewhat to discount the other. If Barbara trusted her father, why did she so desperately need William's support?

Her father chuckled.

"Elder brother business again, eh?" he said. "Well, I've always wondered what would have happened if the elder brother had been at home, instead of the

father, when the prodigal returned. Hi! Reuben! Come out and put up Sammy for me."

Reuben came with extreme reluctance. He had not shared William's alarm in face of the pending situation; and he thought it hard lines that, having stayed at home to greet Barbara (as a matter of fact, he hated sociables, but that was aside from the point), he should now be defrauded of his reward. He drove off to the barn in a rattling hurry, compounded of vexation and a purpose to return.

But, after all, it was not much that happened. Hester Marshall was clearly spent. She was not very strong of late years, anyway, and the day's extra work and anxiety had told upon her. She dropped into a rocking-chair, and her daughter dropped at her feet, taking off her shoes, replacing them with her slippers, caressing her with murmurs of remorse and tenderness. Then the girl sprang to the stove and began to prepare something to eat. Her atonement was as active and effective as her offence had been.

Henry Marshall stood looking on for a moment, his face a curious study of honest concern and perplexity, but equally honest amusement and affection. It was evident that he was troubled—he frowned soberly once after Barbara's eyes had flashed over him—but evident also that he intended eventually to master whatever difficulty he found in his daughter's disposition, and that, meantime, he was not going to flatter and stimulate said difficulty by taking it too seriously. He was one who had almost never been worsted by difficulty. Above everything else, it was evident that

he loved his daughter. His eyes softened and deepened inevitably when she turned and smiled pleadingly at him.

He was a fine figure of a man. His fifty-five years had molded him, hardening his limbs, squaring his shoulders, chiseling his features. The latter were rather rugged, but they were clearly cut. His whole build was massive; one understood where Barbara got her physical scope. His hair and beard were beginning to show streaks of gray. Youth was long past for him, but old age was seemingly just as remote. In the full heart of life he stood, like a lusty tree. His daughter returned his affection. Her eyes reflected the look in his when, hesitating and shaking his head, he at last smiled at her.

In truth, it was now apparent that she looked like him. William, waiting his chance to escape, and meantime bringing in wood for the fire, noted the resemblance with some surprise. An hour ago, in the open, he had thought that the girl's face suggested no member of her family. Now it seemed to him that he had never seen two people look so alike as this father and daughter. There was in both faces the same square cut to the chin, the same broad molding of the forehead, the same quietness in the eyes. Above all, there was the same expression of strength and earnestness. But surely Barbara had not worn that look a couple of hours ago. William remembered how she had then seemed to him like a flame, a cascade, like a young tree tossed by the wind, like anything in the world but a symbol of quietness. Well, he was

used to being puzzled by the changes in Barbara—so used that he really was not puzzled, only interested and on the alert for new developments. Which would dominate as she grew older: the eyes or the mouth? the wanderer or the home-keeper? He wondered, a little wistfully. It was only her eyes that gave him the least hope for the desire that he hardly dared recognize in his own hidden heart.

She let him go when he next attempted to take his leave.

"Thank you, William."

She could not give him her hand, for she was beating an omelette; but she looked straight and steadily into his eyes with an expression of beautiful trust. A soul that trusts another like that has learned almost the best thing in life. There was humility in her gaze too, but it was so genuine that it ignored its own sense of shame. When one is thoroughly sorry, one is not afraid to look one's friend in the face.

"Good-night, Barbara."

William smiled rallyingly at her. Then he took his hat, shook hands with the two older people, and went out into the night. It was significant—as the phrase runs, "it spoke volumes" concerning his relation with this family—that, though Henry Marshall repeated his daughter's formula of gratitude, the words had a comfortable ring of matter-of-factness, as if he were thanking the sun for rising or the brook for flowing. "Thank you, William;"—yes, but one is always thanking William.

In truth, for the last seventeen years, the Marshalls

had lived in a well-nigh perpetual state of obligation to William Sloan. He himself reviewed the situation, as he went home through the moonlight—not calling it obligation, but a strangely reiterated demand that life itself made upon him, a precious privilege in which there lurked a bitterness. He had never intended to saddle himself with Barbara Marshall's destiny when, as a boy of fifteen, he had gone off to find her and bring her back from her first escapade. He had not thought much about the occurrence. He was good at finding strayed animals, and his going straight to the sap-house, where the lost baby agonized, seemed to him only an unusually fortunate piece of luck. He carried her all the way home; the clasp of her little arms about his neck was irresistible. He apprehended now, looking back, that an absolutely cosmic bond was established in that hour.

The next time she ran away—pretty soon—Henry Marshall sent for him; and again he went straight to her in the heart of the woods. She was not frightened this time. She was sitting on a big rock, calmly waiting for him. When she saw him, she climbed down and ran and slipped her little hand into his. "I'll show oo a birdie's nest," she said benignantly.

Thus it had gone on. No wonder the Marshalls ceased to have any special sense of obligation to William, they were so frequently indebted. Finding Barbara was his chore, just as killing woodchucks was the prerogative of the Simmons boy, and snaring rabbits the profession of Tom Henderson. Country

neighbors help and rely on one another with a frank generosity.

But every one thought it unfortunate that the demand should come so often. No Marshall child had ever had such a mania for running away. Henry refused to be seriously troubled. "She'll outgrow it," he said; "and all the sooner for giving way to it now. I'll see that she's punished every time it happens." Which, being interpreted, implied that, in his philosophy, human nature was the better for getting its sin actively out of it, and then receiving punishment and learning what was expected of it. But Hester said nothing. She had to let Henry discipline their children; for all his world had to let him do whatever he wanted. But often she wondered whether she did not understand Barbara better than he, and whether, in general, wayward natures could be checked by punishment. That which is in the blood is perhaps transmutable, but is seldom docile to dictation. Hester's own blood whispered secrets of insight and wisdom to her.

William knew about all these things. As he grew older he frequently shared the counsels of the Marshalls. Henry spoke out to him, airing his finished views on life and people. Hester said little, but her silence was eloquent to one who understood. He and she knew Barbara—at least, they held the clue to her; and their knowledge made them anxiously ignorant of her future development.

Her grandfather had known her too—dear, tender-hearted old Barnaby, with the roving step. Between

the little girl and the old man had existed one of those beautiful relations that sometimes bind youth and age, transporting both beyond their limitations. They were inseparable companions as long as he lived. But after he died, Barbara had only his compass about her neck to keep her in touch with him. To William alone was given her full, developing confidence.

This was very sweet to him. At first, her childish prattle was more amusing than anything else; and he came home from his wildwood sessions with her, full of quaint anecdotes. But gradually he ceased to repeat the things she said to him; for they lost their universal nature, and began to reflect a peculiarly marked and intimate personality. He understood that, frank as she was, Barbara would hardly have talked so freely to him if she had not, more or less unconsciously, grown into the habit of freedom with him. Therefore, from honor as well as from choice, he guarded her confidence. Not even with Hester did he share the gloryings and the misgivings that the girl's burning spirit caused him. His understanding with the mother was a silent one.

He was half sorry and half glad when the periods between the runaway episodes widened and widened and finally ceased. He missed his little companion; but, after all, she was not little any more, and in her maturing womanhood lay a growing pang and peril. William had never intended to marry. On general principles he did not want to. There was in his nature a deep-lying need for silence and solitude which had led him always to seek to preserve a wide margin

around his spirit. Instinctively he defended himself from the thought of interference. Moreover (this objection was no more clearly defined than the first, but was perhaps as potent), his mother already supplied all the feminine element that his home could stand. When, therefore, he found his pulses beginning to throb at the touch of Barbara's hand, he was both startled and ashamed, and took himself gravely to task. This was unworthy, preposterous. It offended against the beautiful nature of the relation between the girl and himself, it threatened his soul's precious independence, it boded discord and unhappiness, he must not allow it to be. How hopeless, anyway! The traits that he marked more and more clearly in Barbara were such as he thought he never could satisfy, save by counsel and sympathy. She must never even be asked to share his narrow lot. All very well. Lovers may reason conclusively with themselves, and come to quite final decisions. Unless the little god who lighted the flame in their hearts himself applies the fatal extinguisher, they have no choice but to go on kneeling and worshiping. In spite of himself, William thrilled every time he detected in Barbara a relenting into household ways.

He sighed, as he turned in at his gate and glanced at the kitchen windows. It was long past his mother's bedtime; but she was evidently still up, waiting for him. He stopped in the dooryard a minute, as if to divest himself of one mood before he braced himself to receive another; then he squared his shoulders, opened the door, and entered the kitchen.

It would have been hard to say why the interior of his house lacked the comfort and dignity of the Marshall homestead. It was quite as carefully furnished and rather more carefully kept; its floor and walls and all its appurtenances shone with cleanliness. The lamp on the table burned brightly—a Rochester burner with a white shade; the polished tins on the wall reflected the radiance accurately; even the stove managed to get as notable an effect of brilliance out of its blackness as the lamp-shade out of its effulgence. William blinked dazzled eyes. But there was no invitation in all this glittering tidiness; the spirit shrank from it as involuntarily as the eyes. How should one want to sit down, when all the chairs held themselves rigidly aloof against the wall?

Martha Sloan, William's mother, had imposed her command upon one of the chairs (she was afraid of nothing), and had summoned it to the side of the table, and was sitting on it. On it, not in it; for it had nothing but a hard surface, no bowels of compassion. Its uncompromising back rivaled the shoulders of the woman who occupied it. She was darning stockings. Her hard, thin hands, rather misshapen from much housework, went swiftly but carefully back and forth, setting fresh stitches to work with countless predecessors in the elaborate reconstruction of outworn heels and toes. So far as the tension of her thin gray hair would allow, her forehead was puckered with solicitude; and her straight lips were compressed, whether from absorption in her task or in her thoughts, it was impossible to say. She

was not a restful presence, but at least she explained the room; and there is always a certain satisfaction in the obvious working of cause and effect. William was subject to frequent fits of annoyance with his mother's kitchen; but when he looked at his mother herself, he knew that her environment was inevitable, and he gave over fretting against it.

He said nothing, as he came in to-night; and for a minute his mother said nothing, either. She did not flatter him by greeting him, until she had finished the stitch she was just placing. Then she deposited her hands and her stocking in her lap, and looked at him sharply.

"Well?"

Her voice had all the assurance and challenge of an authorized Day of Judgment.

But William was an unresponsive sinner, not minded to confess.

"Oh, mother! what's the use?" he said somewhat wearily. "It's so late. And you know all about it. I sent word to you."

He did not sit down; but went and took a drink from a tin dipper in a pail of spring water in the sink, and turned toward his bedroom stairs.

"William!" His mother arrested him with emphasis and decision. "That's no tone of voice to use toward your mother. I've sat up for you. Now I want to know what you've been doing, and what excuse you can offer for taking all my cream cheese and sponge cake."

"I sent word to you," William repeated. His man-

ner still continued to hint at an immediate departure, but his voice acquiesced in discussion in spite of himself. "Barbara Marshall——"

"Had run away."

His mother anticipated his statement, and robbed it of all the conciliation which he might have managed to give it. Scorn capped scorn in her three words.

"Well."

William acquiesced again. There was nothing else to do.

"Oh, William! aren't you ashamed of yourself? I don't speak for her; for, in spite of her twenty years, she's just a lawless baby. But you're a sober man, and you ought to know better than to humor her. She's just trying to lead you on, anyway. She——"

But here it was manifest that acquiescence was not necessarily William's only method of dealing with his mother. He turned as sharply as she could ever have turned, and silenced her imperiously.

"Mother, that is not true."

The two confronted each other a minute, looking transiently alike in spite of their really fundamental difference of build. Their eyes were equally unfaltering. Then the mother withdrew. There was no suggestion of capitulation in the silent dignity with which she gathered up her sewing and put her work-basket away. Rather, there was an offended rebuke. She emphasized her authority by her failure to assert it. But the son knew himself the victor.

Perhaps he guessed at the reason why; and that,

in its turn, was the reason why his manner softened, and why he took his mother's candle from her and carried it to her bedroom door. His mother loved him. When one loves with a nature like Martha Sloan's, one finds life difficult.

IV

BARBARA knelt in her mother's garden, weeding vigorously. The hour was early; the sun had not yet wholly vanquished the dew, and the shadows of the elm trees lay cool upon the grass. Even the old house had the serene look of freshly renewed youth, which clarifies everything in the early morning. But Barbara had been up for hours. She had helped her mother get breakfast, then she had washed the dishes and tidied the kitchen. After that she had cared for the milk in the little dairy house down by the brook; and now she was turning her attention to the flower garden.

An ardor of service is wont to characterize the first reaction of honest souls who have sinned and are sorry. This is good, always very good; but nothing to be elated over until it proves itself something more than the swing of the pendulum. Hester Marshall had often seen Barbara tackle her flower garden. She had learned to watch her, for her young zeal was not directed by any great amount of experience or wisdom; and she was quite as apt to uproot a foxglove as a dandelion. Moreover, the mother had learned to expect that, in a few days, the ravaged beds would be left as dependent as ever upon their rightful mistress, their recent, impetuous ministrant having aban-

doned them. Therefore, when this morning she saw Barbara put on a big straw hat and take a weeding fork and trowel, she hovered near a convenient window, watching anxiously, with a little smile in her eyes. Hester loved her daughter, but she loved her garden too.

For some time all went well. Barbara applied her first attention to a border where all the small plants were as unmistakably weeds as the large plants were hardy perennials. While she was busy here, Hester sewed quietly. But when she moved on, her dauntless air expressing unabated energy and determination, her mother dropped her sewing, came and stood close to the window a moment, then turned and went out hastily through the nearest door.

"Barbara!" she called. "Don't forget that that's an annual bed. It's full of young plants."

"Oh, you poor mummy!" Barbara sat back on her heels, and laughed up at her mother. "Have you been watching me, worried to death? Well, I don't wonder, dear. But you needn't have—this time. I was just coming in to ask you which leaves would be likely to belong to nasturtiums and which to chicory."

"Just as if you could learn from my telling!"

Hester smiled responsively back at her daughter. It was the first time since yesterday's escapade that she had directly challenged the girl's face, and she held her gaze steadily for a minute. There was this about Barbara: she would always meet scrutinizing

eyes, and if she thought their question was fair, she would answer it.

"Do you mind if I come and work with you?" The mother's voice had a pondering note, as if she had detected some new thing in her daughter's face. "Then we can consult each other as we go along."

"Mind?"

Barbara snatched the big hat from her head and gave it to her mother. Then she handed her the gardening tools, and ran to the woodshed for a fresh supply. In a few minutes the two women were working side by side, while the shadows of the elm trees moved dreamily over them and the old house brooded above them.

"I wish I really loved gardening," Barbara said by and by. "As you do, I mean," she added quickly, evidently fearing that her words might sound ungracious. "I do love it dearly for your sake. But gardens know how you feel about 'em."

"Don't they?" Hester glanced first at her plants, then at her daughter, as if she would like to reconcile them. "But, being so clever, this garden probably knows that you are too young yet to care for it. It is patient; it can wait."

"Oh, mother!"

Barbara dropped her trowel. She looked up and met her mother's eyes pleadingly. But when the latter held their gentle, steady gaze, the girl changed her mind about going on with her expostulation.

"I can't tell you how that made me feel," she said, returning to her work a little shamefacedly. "I can't

understand it, myself. I don't—oh, mother! I don't want it to wait."

It was characteristic of Barbara that, having renounced her expostulation, she should reclaim it in the next breath. But she spoke in a much more subdued voice than she had at first intended.

Hester made no reply for a minute. She was thinning out poppies, and the task engrossed her attention. Perhaps, too, she felt that a garden conversation must be the saner for long, breezy, fragrant pauses.

"I hated gardening when I was your age," she said by and by, speaking slowly and reluctantly, her voice a curious mixture of brave concession to her daughter and pained apology to her garden.

"Did you, mother?"

Barbara was plainly surprised. Again she dropped her trowel, and this time she did not at once resume it. Her eyes took their turn at challenging her mother. But Hester did not look up; she went on weeding steadily.

"Indeed, yes," she answered, in a level tone. "I hated housework too, and staying at home. I was a good deal like you. I never ran away for whole days; but I was always taking long walks, and planning still longer ones. I wanted to go away."

"Mother!" Barbara sank down on the grass, and looked across the bed at her mother with an eager expression. "But then what happened?" Her tone implied that something cataclysmic must have made

the difference between that long-ago woman and the one before her now.

This time Hester did look up. The glance that she gave her daughter was full of significance.

"Why, I met your father," she answered.

The statement was surely simple enough, familiar, obvious; it could hardly be called news to Barbara. Of course her mother had met her father: hence their whole family life. But it makes all the difference in the world how an obvious statement is expressed. For nothing that really matters is obvious at heart, knowing itself to be forever a divine surprise. Hester's glance and tone had lifted the veil of the commonplace from her marriage, and had given her daughter a breathless glimpse into that which could never be anything but glorious news. She had evidently done this on purpose. Her delicate face flushed with the effort.

Barbara flushed too. A rosy tide suffused her bare throat and cheeks, mounting to her forehead. She sat with her hands clasped about her knees, and her eyes in the grass where, in shy reverence and consternation, they had fallen from her mother's. For a long minute or two neither woman spoke.

To most girls of twenty thoughts of love are by no means unfamiliar. But Barbara's was a virginal nature, pure with the purity of fire rather than of snow. She had had her suitors (she was too beautiful to escape), but she had never easily recognized them as such; and when they had emphasized their attitude, she had turned from them in dislike. It was actually

true that she had never, until this morning, faced and contemplated even the abstract question of marriage.

Hester watched her. The mother's heart misgave her that she should have been the one to cause that flush to dye her daughter's cheeks. She knew her own reverence before the reserve of a maiden soul. But, after all, women must be brave as well as reverent. She was not sorry that she had spoken. By and by she spoke again.

"The garden is right, Barbara"—her tone was grave, yet easy, calculated to relieve the tension of the situation without disparaging it—"perfectly right in waiting for you. It understands; it is very wise in human ways. By and by you will be glad to settle down and strike your roots as deep as the larkspur."

"Oh! for the matter of that"—Barbara detected a chance to escape from her disquieting revery, and seized upon it—"for the matter of that, I feel already as if my tap-root reached at least to China."

She rocked herself slightly from side to side, as if she were testing her depth, and smiled whimsically. Then she reflected.

"Perhaps that's it," she continued. "Perhaps my roots have come out in China, and are calling to me to come after them. I'd love to go to China."

"But, no." She likewise dismissed this notion. "No, of course I belong here. I am like one of the trees or the boulders. You needn't worry, mother. The old place will never let me go."

"You love it, Barbara?"

Hester's tone was doubtful, because Barbara's had

been so complex, pervaded most of all with a zealous resignation which did not quite convince.

"Yes."

The girl hesitated. That was bad. But then she suddenly sprang to her feet, and turned toward the old house.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she cried.

She seemed to be returning the gaze of some living comrade, instead of meeting the impassive glitter of the kitchen windows.

Hester drew a long breath. She had also stopped weeding now, and was sitting on the grass, openly watching her daughter. Again her heart stirred at the new look of growth and maturity and service which she had glimpsed in the girl's face an hour before and which returned to it. But all she said was, "That's good, Barbara," in a quiet voice.

Being on her feet, Barbara resumed her mood of activity.

"It must be time to begin to get dinner," she said, with a practical, businesslike air. "I'll go and do it, mother. You stay here in the garden. Only, don't work too hard."

She stooped to look under the brim of her mother's hat, and shook her head at her.

"You're tired already. Please stop and rest. The sun is getting hot."

Hester returned her daughter's kiss. Demonstration was not inherent in the Marshall character, but Barbara had an occasional way of demanding it. Then she turned away to the kitchen; and the mother

collected her gardening tools, pulled a last weed or two, started to rise, stopped, straightened a plant, once more started and stopped to remove a broken leaf, and at last, with many a hesitating, backward, lingering look, got herself to her feet.

One wonders if the love of gardens is not almost always significant of disappointment somewhere—a tender, healing substitute for something missed in life. Childless women love gardens, and stranded old men, and unsuccessful artists. Hester would have said that she loved hers out of the very fulness of life; but perhaps she forbore to investigate the baffled interests, the futile curiosities, the unformulated sympathies, that found their gracious outlet in her plants and flowers. Never, for one moment, since her return from her unique voyage with her father, had she wanted to leave her husband again. So that, if her world-wide interests were baffled, the denial was heartily, joyously made. Nevertheless, native instincts do not cease to exist for being coaxed underground, any more than a brook dries up in a similar situation; and, like the brook, they sometimes burst forth in unexpected places. People of nimble spirits, who cannot travel and so refresh themselves, must create something. A garden is a sort of creation. Hester Marshall created hers with earnest devotion.

It responded to her very beautifully. Barbara was right when she divined that gardens are jealous and sensitive; they demand all or nothing. But they are generous too; they do not object to filling gaps, to slaking thirsts that once longed for other fountains.

Rather, indeed, they delight in the tender office of compensation; they find a sweet triumph in ministering to needs beyond their ken. Hester's garden knew that it stood for more than it was, that it served its mistress symbolically as well as literally; and it was very humble and proud, requiting her joyously. There was not such another garden in the whole countryside. Rank upon rank of glowing hollyhocks, masses of larkspur, heavy-headed peonies, foxgloves, roses, irises—all these things in their seasons, and many more, made the plot behind the old house a realm of enchantment.

Hester was at work among the blossoming columbines, when her husband came in from the fields and stopped beside her.

"Where's Barbara?" he asked.

"In the kitchen, getting dinner," Hester replied, looking up with a smile. "She's even sorrier than usual to-day.

"In fact," she continued, when Henry said nothing, but stood, looking thoughtfully down at her, "she seems to me different. I can't tell quite why; I've been wondering about it. It's as if I saw the beginnings of a bud in her eyes. For such a long time, just wild leaves and leaves, and then at last a bud."

"I suppose you mean by that"—Henry spoke a little impatiently, but with affection—"that she's beginning to grow up."

"Exactly!"

Hester slowly rose to her feet; and then, with an-

other of her garden after-thoughts, swiftly stooped again.

"Well, I'm sure it's time!"

"Oh, Henry!" Her husband's tone brought Hester erect, squarely facing him. "She's only twenty. And, really, going off for the day is a very little thing."

The mother's tone was as defensive as the father's had been critical.

"She's the oldest of the family, and that means that she ought to be mature for her age. Instead of that, she's a child."

Henry was not to be disarmed; he knit his sturdy brows.

"As for it's being a little thing," he went on immediately, "of course it would be in any one else, though nobody else would be likely to do it; but in Barbara it shows a tendency which I don't like. I thought she had gotten over it; I thought it had been stamped out."

"One can't stamp out tendencies," Hester mused. "One can only divert them," She glanced from her husband to her garden. "I wish," she submitted in a sudden, soft rush of confidence, "that Barbara would marry William Sloan."

"Has he ever asked her?"

"Oh! I don't know."

Hester recoiled from this crude, masculine handling of the case. She could not even go on to say, "But I'm sure he loves her." Instead, she made all possible haste to rescue the delicate subject by chang-

ing it. Her next abrupt question swung far afield even from her own immediately preceding thoughts.

"Are you quite sure, Henry, that you are right in making Barbara your heir?"

It was only a sudden revulsion of feeling, only a blind need to shield something precious, that could ever have brought this inquiry so baldly from Hester's lips. She caught her breath instantly, and would probably have made a third leap, changing the subject again, if her husband had given her time. But he could be as quick as she, when he was really touched.

"Hester!" He frowned in good earnest, looking like one of the rugged mountains under a thunder cloud. "I thought we had settled and finished that question long ago."

"Well, never mind, Henry."

Hester sighed. She had not settled the question; but, then, she and Henry were one. She knit her own delicate brows. The effect was like the passing of a summer breeze over the face of a meadow.

"Look here, Hester." Henry's face was not as conciliating as his words and tone tried to be. "Aren't you satisfied, after all? Didn't I convince you? The Marshall homestead has never failed to pass on to the oldest child. Moreover, Reuben, with all his good points, hasn't got half the real stuff in him that Barbara has. Farming, like everything else, takes genius, if it's going to be made to succeed. Barbara's got genius: spirit, ideas, the pluck to go ahead and make

experiments, the grit to learn from failure. Why, she'd be a perfect farmer already, if only——"

Yes, if only! Hester sighed once more, turning away. The argument was familiar to her. Too familiar. Henry enjoyed reviewing and airing his favorite, accurate deductions. And his "if only" signified no misgiving, no lurking doubt, but rather a manly determination to anticipate and prevent all possible mischances. If only Barbara could be subdued to a proper contentment; very well, then, of course she must be. But Hester had her dread of "if only's," her sense of impotence before them.

Barbara looked up and smiled when her parents entered the kitchen. She was lifting a stove lid with one hand, and with the other pushing a stick of wood in among the flames. In her blue checked apron she looked very domestic.

"You were almost late," she said. "Reuben was beginning to be impatient."

Reuben made no apology at this rallying accusation. He had washed his hands immaculately for his mid-day meal; and, being unwilling to soil them again, sat with them idle before him, waiting. He did not wait gracefully. He glanced at the kitchen clock, which stood at a quarter past twelve.

"Never mind, Reuben." Henry slapped his son's rigid young shoulder—not because he wanted to, for Reuben rather annoyed him in a mood like this, but because he thought the shock would be good for him. "Even the sun doesn't go by the clock; and even the seasons have to wait now and then."

"Lord!" he said to himself in the woodshed, whither he went to wash his own hands and face. "I'd as soon see a threshing machine in charge of my farm as Reuben."

An hour later, when Reuben had long since returned to the fields and Barbara had made her mother go and lie down and then had washed the dinner dishes, singing softly under her breath, Henry came and stood on the threshold of the kitchen door.

"Why, daddy!" Barbara rinsed and wrung the dish-cloth and hung it on its nail. Then she went to her father's side, and slipped her arm through his. "You around here yet? What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

But there was no anxiety in her tone, for her father's face was ruddy.

"Well enough, yes." He patted her hand, and drew her out into the yard, under the shade of the trees. "But I'm not so young as I once was, and it sometimes seems to me that I might as well begin to take things a bit easier. What's the use of being fifty-six; above all, what's the use of having two grown-up children, if you can't indulge yourself?"

Barbara did not answer. She leaned musingly on her father's arm, and rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, as they strolled down toward the gate. He and she were great friends; and perhaps, like most of her sex, she thought her caress was reason enough for his lingering. But when he spoke again his voice admonished her.

"Barbara, daughter, you understand that, after my death, the old place will be yours?"

Barbara looked up quickly. Had her first question been to the point, after all? Was her father not feeling well? But his clear eyes reassured her. She met them steadily, while she dismissed the anxiety which she had feared to face, and pondered the summons which she did not understand. The statement implied in her father's question was no news to her; she had been brought up to think of herself as the heir to the homestead. But his gaze presented a crisis which she had never yet been asked to meet. "Yes, father," was her obvious answer, the answer which, almost of their own accord, her lips opened to frame. But she surprised them and herself by hedging a little.

"Reuben could carry on the name," she suggested, her troubled glance seeking the ground.

"But Reuben——"

Henry began hastily, with some warmth, being urged by two strong emotions. But then he remembered that, even if he, as the father, was perhaps justified in criticizing his son, it was not seemly to foster anything but affection in a sister's breast. Moreover, Barbara's failure to spring to the high demand he made upon her was probably not so amenable to anger as to gentleness. He curbed himself.

"You're the oldest child, and the homestead has always gone to the first-born," he said. "And, anyway, Barbara, you're just cut out for a farmer."

The first part of this speech was perfunctorily spoken, but the second part came with a rush.

"I?"

Barbara opened wide eyes.

"Why, yes, girl; above most folks, you! Farming's a great work. It takes ideas and gumption. It's very exciting. I pity the poor bored city fellows you read about in the papers, who go to gambling houses. If they only knew how exciting it was to gamble with the weather, with potato bugs and cut worms and woodchucks, they'd all of them turn farmers."

Barbara's face kindled doubtfully. She had never heard her father talk like this before. She knew that his life interested him, that he was heart and soul committed to its development; but she had never realized what a profound enthusiasm he felt for it. His Marshall reserve had carefully hidden all the zest beneath a cloak of the matter-of-course. His present outspokenness gave her a new point of view. She turned her eyes slowly from his boyishly irradiated face, and looked out over the broad meadows, lying beyond the fence. Were they a possible arena for thrilling adventure? She was not at all insensible of the compliment which her father paid her. She turned back to him and smiled responsively.

"You see, Barbara, don't you?" he coaxed. The coaxing of one who is used to command is irresistible. "You get the idea? It's a great one, believe me. You'll like it, if you once take it up. Come now, girl; tell me you're going to give over playing with childish notions of running away, and settle

down and become a good home-keeping lass. Tell me you're going to be willing to take charge of the old place some day."

Barbara still hesitated. Her hand lay in her father's arm; but she turned wholly away from him, looking out over pastures and fields, and then side-wise at the old house. There was a curious struggle in her young face. The pastures did nothing to detain her scrutiny of them; her glance traversed them swiftly. But at the house her eyes came to a pause; and for several minutes she gazed steadily, without moving or speaking. Then, "Yes, father," she said very simply, just as her lips had advised her to say in the beginning.

V

HESTER MARSHALL'S death was a shock to the whole community, even to the village doctor. She had not been strong for some years; but she had never complained of feeling any particular indisposition, and people had grown used to her pallor and her quiet ways.

She was ill only twenty-four hours. During the first five or six, her husband and Reuben were away in a remote wood-lot, and the doctor was likewise out of reach on a mountain-side. Barbara was not greatly alarmed. She had often seen her mother faint, and she thought she knew just what to do for her. Afterwards she looked back on that morning as on the open threshold of eternity. It was awful, but very sweet, to remember those lingering hours.

Perhaps Hester herself did not know what had happened to her. If she did, she concealed the knowledge, sparing her daughter as long as possible, and making the most of the solemn opportunity. She did not suffer much, save from weakness. She lay very still, and kept her eyes closed and talked fragmentarily.

"Have you finished the dishes, dear? Well, then, get some sewing and come and sit beside me. Yes, I feel better. But, no, I don't want to sleep. I'd rather have you near.

"Barbara"—after a long pause, during which the girl sat in her cool blue gingham dress, rocking and sewing—"you've been a good child lately."

"Yes, haven't I?" Barbara looked up with a smile. "Well, I guess I'm growing up." She nodded soberly.

"I'm very glad." Hester tried to look up too, and gave a little sigh. "But you've never suffered. You can't really grow up until you have suffered."

"Oh!" Barbara winced and dropped her sewing, and her rocking-chair came to a pause. There was another long silence. Then, "Well, I guess I'm not afraid," the young voice answered slowly.

"No, I'm sure you're not." The mother's voice was quiet and dreamy, as if she were aware of something infinitely reassuring and soothing. Her words trailed off into silence, and she seemed to sleep for a while.

"Barbara"—once more the gentle tones recalled the girl's attention—"it's mostly women who suffer and grow up. Men don't always. Your father has never grown up."

"Why!" Barbara was startled. She stopped and took counsel with her own thoughts. "That's so; he hasn't, mother!" she cried, with a ripple of sympathetic amusement.

Hester opened her eyes with an effort, and the two women looked at each other. "Oh, my daughter," the mother thought, "if only I could, at the same time, help you grow up, and stay to enjoy you when you have done so!"

Another "if only!"

"He needs lots of care," she concluded gently, "and lots of—well, humoring." She smiled underneath her closed eyes.

For a long time after this colloquy had likewise been sealed with silence Barbara sat with her hands in her lap. The new conception of her father as a big, overgrown boy, held her imagination. Now and then she smiled to herself. She was reviewing her whole experience from a new point of view.

But Hester had dismissed the theme. Doubtless she realized, consciously or unconsciously, that the time for deeply pondering any one theme—save presently the Theme of themes—was over for her. When she next spoke she recalled her daughter from the concrete to the abstract.

"There's something else besides sorrow that women are made for," she murmured. "That's love, Barbara."

She fairly had to force her eyes open; but, when once the gates were ajar, her spirit looked out as bravely as ever. She scrutinized her daughter's face. No use! The wide girlish eyes had no responsive reflections in them this time.

"Well, remember it, anyway, dear," she admonished. "And love means a home. A home. There isn't anything in the world to take the place of a home."

Whether it was the word "remember" that frightened her, or whether her mother's increasing pallor at last began to make its effect, Barbara suddenly paused in her sewing, then knelt down beside the bed

and gazed with a mounting terror into the still face on the pillow. What was it? What was about to happen? Oh! where was her father?

Once more Hester opened her eyes.

"Remember, you're not going to be afraid," she whispered, and fainted away again.

When Henry and Reuben returned to the house they found Barbara perfectly white and perfectly self-possessed.

"I sent for the doctor at seven o'clock," she explained. "Jamie Williams went for me. He was expected home about noon. He must be here presently. Yes, she's conscious now. You go in, father. Oh!"—for her father's face overwhelmed her—"oh, my dear daddy! But you mustn't let her see you look like that. We must make her happy to-day."

They did make her happy—all of them. Even Reuben helped. During the afternoon she lay with her hand in her husband's, smiling at him every time she could get her eyes open, and frequently when she could not. She seemed to have very little to say. But people who have lived heart in heart have no need of last words. Barbara, for the most part, kept herself in the background. The priceless morning had been hers, and all the rest of the time belonged to her father. But now and then she and Reuben crept in and stood by the bed, and Barbara knelt and kissed the white, wandering hands.

The doctor came and went. There was really nothing he could do; but, like every one else, he loved Hester. The neighbors came and went, too. Intru-

sion was an unknown word in the simple country vocabulary, but sympathy and helpfulness were very familiar. Barbara paid no attention to them; she hardly knew they were there. Once she looked up from the kitchen stove, where she was heating some water, and saw William Sloan, standing outside the kitchen door and looking in at her. She met his eyes absently; then, for the first time during that awful day her firm lips trembled. But he saved her at once.

"Never mind, Barbara," he said. "I see you don't need me now, so I won't come in. But I'll hang around here; and if you want me, you just call."

She could not have called, however, and he spared her the necessity, when, in the early morning, her mother's spirit slipped away. He came and looked at her where she stood, dazed, on the threshold of the room; then he took her hand—almost as cold and unresponsive as Hester's—and led her out of the house.

The sun was just rising. Across the shoulders of the mountains long fingers of light struck slantwise and touched the world awake. The birds were singing, the dew lay cool on the meadows, it was going to be a lovely day. Barbara turned and looked at the garden. Then her face broke into spasms of pain.

"Oh, William! No! No!" she cried, and hid her face in his breast.

He held her close. For him, too, the hour had lifted all feeling into the realm of the sublime and universal. He was to her all strength and comfort,

and she was to him all sorrow and weakness and appeal. Their two individualities were well-nigh forgotten. Thus, in great moments, God knows how to make His creatures simply the channels of His divinity. But when William bent his head to look compassionately at the smooth, half-hidden cheek, suddenly he flinched, the spell broke. Imperatively he released Barbara from his arms. He hovered near her all day, and through many succeeding days, but he did not touch her again.

Thus it happened that life gave Barbara Marshall her first serious chance to grow up. She profited by it bravely, as soon as she had recovered from the first reeling shock and annihilation. For a month or two after her mother's death, it seemed to her, not so much that she had lost something out of life, as that the whole structure of her existence had gone to pieces and had to be painfully picked up and put together, according to a new plan. She was bewildered, at a loss. God builds our first house of blocks for us; we accept it complacently. Then He knocks it down and says, "Now build it for yourself." Whereupon, weeping and protesting, we begin to live.

But daily necessity is a good, insistent nurse; and Barbara laid her new foundation almost without knowing it. Her position, as feminine head of the house, brought no new duties upon her, for she had borne the brunt of the work before her mother's death; but it gave her a sobering sense of responsibility. Her father tried to help her at first. He had a parent's natural distrust of the daughter's ability as

contrasted with the mother's, and he was never one to doubt his own ability in any direction. It was his serious, blundering effort to rearrange the dishes on the pantry shelves that gave Barbara her first surprised intimation that she might possibly ever be able to smile again. She circumvented him tactfully; and he abandoned his attempt, not so much out of respect for her superior feminine skill as out of sheer masculine weariness with the task he had set himself.

Barbara had to spend more or less time circumventing her father these days. He was very difficult. Again and again she remembered her mother's dying remark about the immortal boyishness of some men. Grief is made for the purpose of growth, and people who are not going to grow must not be held still to take sorrow bravely, but must be coaxed and beguiled into forgetting. So long as her father dwelt on the thought of her mother he was good for no manly sort of life and work. His face was tortured, his eyes were haunted with a helpless desolation that went to his daughter's heart. She made one dreadful experiment of sitting beside him and holding his hand and talking about her mother; but the storm of dry sobs that presently shook him frightened her half to death, and she only saved the situation by wresting the subject violently to the consideration of a new patent device for boiling sap. After that she never let him linger about the kitchen or garden, but sent him promptly off to work; and, in the evenings, she took to playing cribbage with him.

In the first completeness of her understanding that

he must be blinded and shielded, she thought of destroying the garden. It was William who saved the situation. He came on the girl, crying her heart out under the syringa bush, with a great spade beside her. One uprooted fox-glove lay in the garden path.

"It's only the first one that hurts so frightfully," she sobbed, when she saw him. "I guess I can do the rest by and by. Oh, William! you do it for me."

He understood at once—when had he ever failed to understand Barbara?—and he took counsel with himself whether he dared sit down beside her. He deferred his decision until he had put the uprooted fox-glove back in its hole and had brought it some water; then he seated himself on the other end of the garden bench.

Barbara watched him, her tears drying on her stormy face.

"But, William," she murmured.

"Yes, dear, I know. But really you must not do that. Believe me, you mustn't."

"Not even for father's sake? It hurts him."

"Not for any one's sake. This garden belongs to your mother and God. It has a soul of its own. You must never dare."

"Oh, William!" Barbara had no compunction about leaving her end of the bench. She slid close to her companion. "It is wonderful how you make things come right."

But poor William looked away with a white face.

It must, indeed, have been true that the garden had a sweet, resolute soul of its own; or else the soul that

had vanished continued to care for it. It had never blossomed so bravely as during that first summer of its destitution. Though perhaps destitution is a strong word. Barbara worked among the flowers, and did her best to surmount the difficulties that lay in her natural ineptitude and inexperience. She deluged the hollyhocks with whale oil soap and the roses with Bordeaux mixture. But no amount of deliberate zeal can ever make up for a lack of spontaneity; and the garden knew that Barbara did not love it for itself. The sight of her mother's gardening gloves was needed to remind her to water the sweet peas.

It was so with the care of the house. Something was always needed to spur her to domestic enterprise—as, for instance, the sight of her father fumbling in the china-closet. She was not lazy; she was not even indifferent, when once her attention was roused. She was simply negligent. The recurring duties of everyday life took care of themselves, providing their own spurs of immediate necessity. There was never any failure in the promptness and excellence of Barbara's meals, nor in the cleanliness of her rooms and dishes. But Reuben had to remind her that the crab-apples were ripe and ready to be made into jelly.

What was the matter? she wondered sometimes, as she sat in her favorite nook by her grandfather's anchor in the front yard. She was a woman now, quite grown up; why did she not feel any keener zest for the usual interests of a woman's life? The criticism that had attended her developing childhood and girlhood had encouraged in her a certain natural ten-

dency toward introspection, and she often challenged herself. But she could not answer her own question. She felt humbled and ashamed at the lack which she perceived in herself.

What did she want, then? What was the nature of the secret, imperious urging that made the immediate opportunities of her life so unattractive to her? Sometimes, when she put the question, she looked up at the impassive crests of the mountains about her as if she found their immutability intolerable. But she never could say exactly what she wanted of them or of herself; and it took but the sound of her father's step to change her mood, transforming her into a loving, self-forgetful daughter. Whatever else may or may not have been spontaneous about Barbara, her love for her father was a springing fountain.

The old house knew how to govern her, too. Imaginative from her babyhood, she had always thought of her home as one of the most important personal factors in her life; and now that she was left so much alone with it, the influence grew. She spent a good deal of time wandering through the old rooms, trying vaguely to propitiate them. Her mother's bedroom opened out of the kitchen, and here she took refuge continually, sitting between the rather shabby old mahogany bureau and the big mahogany bed with its patchwork counterpane, and clinging to the memory of the dear face that had lately lain there. As she lingered, she busied herself with the mending of her father's clothes or the ordering of his bureau drawers.

But sometimes she suddenly laid down her work,

and rose and opened the door that led out into the narrow front hall, and went across to the parlor that occupied the other corner of the front of the house. Here she made straight for her grandfather's shells, lifting them eagerly from the prim center-table on which they lay alongside a hand-painted cup and saucer and an illustrated copy of "Evangeline," and holding them, one by one, to her ear. The parlor was not a genial apartment. It was used only on state occasions, and was therefore continually on its good behavior; it knew what was expected of it. Its old chair and its fine old mahogany sofa, covered with hair-cloth, held themselves at discreet conversational angles, inviting nothing but formal remarks. The light came dimly through its shaded windows, and its big old fireplace yawned in bored vacuity behind a bowl of feathery asparagus. Its air was chill and musty. But Barbara liked it for its reserve. It did not torment her as did the more active kitchen.

The latter apartment—scene of her own daily life and of that of all her ancestors—was often almost too much for her. It was the biggest room in the house, and, no matter how the sun poured in at the low west windows or how brightly the lamp burned at night, there were always shadows lurking somewhere. They were intensely alive, those shadows; and presences stirred in them, footsteps echoed, voices all but spoke. It would seem as if the matter-of-fact range and kitchen table and tin and enamel dishes might have counteracted the spell which this place knew how to cast; but they really provided the outer and visible fetters

for it. Sometimes, when Barbara was frying potatoes or baking a pie which she could not leave, the whole room, big and dark as it was, seemed to close in around her, and only her sense of immediate responsibility kept her from running away.

She was too healthy minded to tolerate this sort of experience any more than was necessary; and, as soon as she could, she went out of doors and sat by the anchor, where, nestling into the comforting curve of one of the great iron prongs, she faced her home, stared at it, stared it down, until its windows ceased to threaten, and its roof was once more benignant rather than oppressive.

She and her father and Reuben grew very close to one another during the long winter after Hester's death. They were no more solitary than their neighbors; in fact, they were rather more frequently sought out. For Henry's advice was needed in all the affairs of the township, and Reuben himself was beginning to be consulted by his comrades. But winter storms are authoritative, and this was a cruel winter. It laid a mandate of isolation on all the farmhouses. When the three were alone together, cut off by the smothering snow and the blinding wind, Barbara had to exert herself to keep her father occupied; and thus she grew in womanly wisdom and dexterity. She cluttered her kitchen with a score of "labor-saving" devices, which she did not want in the least, but which she coaxed her father to think out and construct for her. His unconsciously growing dependence on her touched and warmed her. She loved to see his eyes

turn instinctively to her. But of course his very appeal constituted the most imperative kind of a claim; and, the more he needed her, the more surely he ruled her.

Even Reuben was softened by the brave intimacy of that pensive winter. He relaxed the young severity of his usual criticisms of his sister, and condescended to play a part that was often quite brotherly.

VI

BARBARA dreaded the spring. It was always a restless season with her; and this year its first intimations confirmed her fear that it was going to prove uncommonly fraught with trouble.

There was her mother's garden. The sight of the first pushing tips of the awakening plants acted upon her like the turning of a sword in her heart. How cruel that the mere symbol should have such a prompt and vigorous resurrection, while the reality remained hidden, forever and evermore giving no sign! Yet she loved it too dearly to stay away from it. Each narcissus, each tulip, each peony she greeted with tears in her eyes. Like her mother, she stole time from the kitchen to weed and prune and trim and order the disheveled beds. Her interest was vicarious, but it was genuine.

Having stolen so much time for this cause, however, she could not manage to steal any more for her usual spring rambles on the mountains and in the woods; and this failure fretted her even more than she was aware. She had no lack of exercise and fresh air. Between the house and the garden every muscle was brought into play. But her spirit was fettered; it beat its wings, longing for leagues of mountainside and the full sweep of the wind. She

had never before failed to hunt and find the rare arbutus on the crest of Sunset Hill.

These troubles were serious, but they were nothing compared to the problem that faced her in May, and that, for a time, threatened to make an end of all her serenity. One of her Dakota cousins—her father's second cousin's son—came East on business, stopped to make a visit at the homestead, and, after a few weeks of rapidly increasing and very distressful intimacy, asked her to marry him.

He was quite an admirable young man—that was the worst of it: tall and strong, very good looking, a capable farmer, Dick Marshall by name. From the moment of his arrival, Henry openly delighted in him, and took every occasion to praise him to Barbara.

"Just the kind of man for a farm like this! I wish he could stay and help me. I need the stirring up of his western ideas. Don't you like him, Barbara?"

Oh, yes! she liked him—well enough. Liked him very much at first, when he treated her like the cousin she considered herself; liked him, unfortunately, less and less as he grew more intimate; liked him finally, one day, not at all; almost hated him.

But was that the question—her liking or disliking? Were not bigger and more important issues at stake? Underneath all the eagerness and fire of her nature Barbara had her full share of the rather fatalistic passivity that plays such an important part in the New England temperament, particularly among mountain women. That which is to be, will be; that which

ought to be, must be. It was not for her to dispute or question the decisions of Destiny. Because of his strong will and because of the great love she bore him, her father had always acted as Destiny's deputy to her; and now she hardly knew how to begin to find him at fault. But she was very unhappy, more unhappy than she had supposed it was possible to be. Her grief for her mother had been single, unperplexed by distractions and doubts. It had simply called on her to bend her whole effort to the inevitable task of acceptance and adjustment. Now she was buffeted. Her father's watchful eyes tormented her. Was she not bound to do that which would place a crown of contentment on his life?

Nor was this quite the end of the matter, or the beginning—whichever way she tried to trace the hidden force that urged her so curiously. There was more than herself or her father or mother at work within her. She knew very little in detail about her earlier ancestors, for their shadowy, dead affairs had never greatly interested her; but she was not for nothing their lineal descendant. Whether she knew it and wished it or not, they went on living in her; and in spite of herself, she was obliged to share their interests. She half realized this now, groping blindly among the strange reluctances which made it so hard for her to obey the imperative impulse to reject Dick Marshall. The homestead, the family: these were the two great interests of her fathers, the two that were entirely one. They claimed her with the authority of an unbroken tradition.

Her misery was complicated by the fact that her duties, as hostess and housekeeper, prevented her from leaving the house for more than a few minutes at a time. She did not feel obliged to entertain her cousin; he was a self-sufficient person, and could amuse himself. He spent many hours, working with Henry and Reuben in a manner that won their admiration. But she did feel obliged to feed him and keep order for him. Her position as sole woman on the place hampered her.

And the house had become intolerable. It gathered up and embodied all the power against which she strove, all the tradition which formed so large and so hated a part of her nature. Left alone with it for hours, she felt smothered, oppressed. Two or three times she dropped her broom or her dish-cloth and ran out of the door, heading for the hills. But the garden always stopped her and turned her back. Her mother's roses admonished her that no Marshall woman must be deficient in hospitality.

She was actually, sometimes, a little relieved when, at the end of a solitary afternoon, she saw her cousin returning through the gate. No mysterious spells could persist in the breezy presence of his young sanity. But her relief never lasted long. It proved to be but the rebound from one kind of dismay to another. Before the young man had so much as put his foot over the threshold, her whole being was up in arms.

"Ah, Barbara, don't!" he coaxed sometimes. "You don't really hate me so much as all that. I don't believe you hate me at all; but, being a woman——"

At this point he found himself addressing empty but strangely electric air; and had no choice but to break off his speech, or finish it to the kitchen pump.

As in the matter of her reluctance, so in the contrary matter of her impulse, Barbara found herself urged by forces that transcended the present crisis. Not only her own immediate longing, but also a hidden, boundless sea bade her cry "No!" to every word of her cousin's. A sea: that was it. It surged and clamored, rolling great waves to meet and drown every admonition. Her father, her mother, the old house, her conscience, even her fatalism seemed to confront it in vain. What was it? Being, itself? Barbara was too young and untutored to think very clearly about these matters; but she longed almost intolerably at times to find and embark on this hidden sea, giving herself over to it. At such times she went out and sat by the old anchor, or entered the parlor and put one of the shells to her ear.

"You don't like him, Barbara!"

Her father spoke hesitatingly to her one evening, with a curious mixture of disappointment and impatience in his tone.

Barbara stirred and sighed. She had fallen into a twilight revery on the steps. Dick and Reuben had gone to the village; and she and her father were left alone, the work of the day all finished. She also hesitated a moment. Then, "No, father," she decided to say, out of a vague, conflicting rumor of possible answers, impossible through their formlessness.

"But why, girl?"

Henry's impatience grew. He frowned a little.

"Oh! I don't know, father."

The answer was all that could have been expected of her. It ought to have been enough for any one who, himself, had ever loved. But Henry was a definite man (perhaps he would have said that he knew just why he had loved Hester), and he had no respect for nebosity.

"Then if you don't know," he said concisely, "you ought to be willing to do what every one else knows would be a very good thing for you."

Barbara shrank a little—she was leaning against one of the pillars; but she found nothing to say. Her father studied her. Perhaps he was sorry that he had spoken so emphatically. At any rate, he continued more gently:

"It really is just the thing for you, daughter. You'll have to marry soon, for I think Reuben and Jenny Slocum are going to make a match. I'm getting old. I want to be able to stop pretty soon. If you hunted the world over, you couldn't find a better farmer than Dick. Then there's the name, you know. Barbara, you must have nothing but boys to begin with."

But there he, too, like Dick the evening before, found himself addressing empty air. Barbara had gone, like an arrow; and in her room she was hiding her head in her pillow and weeping outraged tears.

VII

IT was, as usual, William who saved her. On one errand or another, he was now almost a daily visitor at the farm. His own farm adjoined, and he and Henry and Reuben had many things in common, so that he was accustomed to a frequent passing back and forth. But Dick's presence had a curiously magnetic effect upon him; he seemed unable to keep away. Not that he had much to say to him, or seemed to like him particularly; but simply that he felt the necessity of keeping his eyes on him. Watchful and anxious, he hovered continually in the background of the little family group. Henry could not understand his new ungracious persistence.

One afternoon, he presented himself at the kitchen door when Barbara had just finished washing the dishes. The three Marshall men were out in the fields.

"Did I leave my pruning shears here?" he inquired. "You haven't seen them? Well, never mind; perhaps Reuben has them. How goes it, Barbara?"

The last sentence of this little speech was spoken quite differently from the rest; though it was all direct and gentle enough, delivered with no wandering of the eyes in search of the missing shears. Friendly solicitude informed every syllable of the last words.

Barbara did not reply at once. She had come to the door on William's approach; and stood, looking out at him through the fine mesh of the screen.

"William," she said at last, unexpectedly enough, "I wish you were a woman."

William did not smile. Barbara's eyes were too serious and appealing. Involuntarily, he drew his big frame into a somewhat more masculine pose than usual; but all that he said was, meeting her mood,

"You might try me, Barbara."

Then, suddenly, they both smiled. Barbara opened the door and came out and stood beside him.

"Let's go for a walk," she suggested. "I'm tired to death of the house. Where shall we go?"

She looked up at her friend, as if she were giving her destiny into his hands; and he, looking down at her, accepted the responsibility. He led the way out through the front gate, down the road, and across a pasture which stretched away from the Marshall farm and commanded a view of another turn of the valley.

Barbara walked very fast at first. She said little, but her bearing was eloquent of temporary relief and expansion above a persistent bond. She threw her head back and breathed deeply; but she still held her shoulders rigid. William watched her. He had accepted the present guidance of her actions, but he regulated his control by a study of her mood. When it seemed to him that she had worked off the worst of her oppression, and when a fold of the hilly pasture had hid them from all backward glimpsing of the Marshall farm, he slackened his pace and called her

attention to a mound of soft, deep turf underneath a tree.

"Let's rest awhile," he said. "I can't be a woman unless I sit down and give my mind to it."

Barbara laughed. The bodily exercise and the open spaciousness of earth and sky had cleared her brain and restored her poise. Her eyes were no longer brooding, though her lips were still firmly set.

"I wouldn't really have you a woman for anything, William," she said, surveying affectionately her companion's big and rather awkward bulk.

"Wouldn't you? Well, I confess, I'm relieved." He threw himself on the grass beside her, depositing his hat on a bush of prairie weed. "Because, if you wanted it, I should of course have to manage it somehow."

His tone implied a whimsical resignation which hid the earnestness that lay at the heart of it.

"Poor William!" Barbara's own voice responded to his implication, though perhaps her heart, hid even from herself, acknowledged his sincerity. "It's hard lines, isn't it, that you should always have to take care of me?"

"Very." He smiled and shook his head, not looking at her.

"Well"—Barbara spoke slowly, hesitating, and choosing each word with a reluctance which showed that she did not like it, but that it was the least objectionable expression she could find; a very lovely, girlish color suffused her cheeks—"well—I suppose—if I—marry—Dick—I shall be off your hands."

William rolled over and dug his elbows savagely into the moss. The statement was just what he had expected, what he had in fact deliberately gone out to hear to-day; but now that he had received it, he was infuriated by it.

"Do you love him?" he asked, after a moment, in a stifled voice.

Barbara winced; then she rallied, with an air of holding to some self-appointed task.

"No," she replied.

"Well, I didn't think you did"—William's voice was hoarse with his inner struggle—"but I supposed you must, if you were willing to think of marrying him."

Barbara flushed still more deeply. She felt the significance of her friend's remark. But, after a moment, she refused to be shamed by it.

"Love is selfish," she said, speaking with dignity and a certain high unassailability. "There are other, better motives that can make one do things."

William sat up. He felt that he was the one to be ashamed. He had brought Barbara out here to help her, and now he was girding at her. The proud integrity of her spirit challenged him. Here was a woman whom not even a loveless marriage could soil. For a moment he felt helpless before her. Then he set his lips. He had never yet failed to control her.

"Barbara," he said, "you're pretty young yet, and you don't know much about life. I don't know any too much, myself. But I do know this: that God expresses Himself in our natures as urgently as in the

rivers and hills, and that our only chance of being true to Him lies in being true to ourselves. Obedience is our first duty. We must, above everything else, be true to God."

Barbara brought her eyes back from the valley, and looked at William. This was a new kind of talk from him. She had lately surmised that his mind had a strong philosophical and religious bent, but her own young ignorance and inattention had never taken the trouble to investigate it. Now he was opening the way, himself, and bidding her follow. Since she would fain be mature and profound, looking into the causes of things, very well, she must be made to look deeper, even into the Cause of causes.

"Yes, William."

It was significant that, not knowing exactly what to say, she gained time by acquiescing. At least, she could never go very far wrong by acquiescing with William. She waited with attentive eyes.

But—"That's really all," he surprised her by saying. "Think it over. You'll understand it. You half understand it now."

Did she? Barbara wondered, as she slowly turned her eyes away, and looked down at the river, flowing, flowing, and at the molded hills. William relapsed into silence. He was content with the turn he had given her thoughts, and he waited for her to swing out into the new region he had indicated. By and by she began to talk again, feeling her way.

"You mean that what we want to do has a sort of claim on us?"

"Very much of a claim!" He took her up. "That which we think we ought to do, that which we perhaps decide to do, has to be worked out by reason—and that's half blind at the best. But that which we want to do comes straight from God."

"But what becomes of duty and self-denial and things like that?"

Barbara was troubled.

"Some people want to deny themselves," William replied, thinking perhaps, not unpardonably, of his own case. But, "No, Barbara," he went on at once, parrying a swift glance of her eyes, "you know you don't. Be honest. You know you want to fly to the ends of the earth every time Dick looks at you."

Barbara frowned. Then she clasped her hands about her knees, threw back her head, and swung out in good earnest.

"If you're going to talk about ends of the earth," she said, seizing upon William's last words as a point of departure, "it isn't only Dick that makes me want to fly to them."

"No, I suppose not, Barbara."

It was now William's turn to be acquiescent. He nodded and waited.

"You notice I don't run away any more." She made him a funny little face of self-mockery. "That's because I'm ashamed to, not in the least because I don't want to. I often want to exactly as much as when I was seven years old. I wonder if I shall ever get over wanting to."

William glanced at her. He sighed.

"Only perhaps you want to go farther now," he suggested in a troubled but resolute voice.

"Yes!" She nodded in glad satisfaction at his understanding. "Quite to the ends of the earth, which we have both been talking about. William, do you suppose it is just childishness in me?"

"I don't know, Barbara." William spoke seriously, meeting the seriousness which he read in her flexible voice. "That's what I have been wondering. That's what makes all the difference in the world. As I said before, you're pretty young yet; you might get over your restlessness, and learn to like to stay at home." His eyes, behind their careful shield, had a depth of wistfulness. "On the other hand," he went on resolutely, "you might grow more and more restless; and then I guess you'd have to go away."

"Go away? Why, William!" Barbara spoke softly under her startled breath. "How could I go away?" She challenged him.

"Not just now, of course." He met her eyes reassuringly, though quite unrecantingly. "But perhaps by and by. We must wait and see."

Barbara's face sobered. She sat in silence for several minutes. Once, she glanced over her shoulder in the direction of the Marshall homestead, and a curious look of mingled love and dread came into her eyes.

"I don't like your by and by," she said at length. "It's full of sadness. And, anyway, William, whatever happened, there would always be the farm."

The note of finality in her last words seemed quite unanswerable.

"And there would always be you." William lost not a second of time in replying. His tone swept the barrier from hers. "Which is the more important?

"You see," he went on, without giving her time to struggle with the proposition, "you've simply got to live your life. It's not so easy as it sounds to find out just what that is, for you're not built on a simple plan. You've got two kinds of ancestors in you. I've been hoping the Marshalls would win out"—he smiled at her to cover the sudden yearning in his voice—"but Barnaby Rogers has always seemed to me to have the upper hand. If he triumphs in the end, Barbara, you must go away."

At the mention of her grandfather, Barbara's hand went to the little compass which she almost always wore about her neck, underneath her dress. Her eyes shone and deepened. The singing of the hidden sea was loud in her ears. Nevertheless, she shook her head.

"There's the garden," she murmured. "You know, you wouldn't let me dig that up. And it holds me very tight. My roots go deeper than the hollyhocks."

"Well"—there was relief in William's tone, though not yet a relinquishment of purpose—"I said I didn't know; we must wait and see. But, while we're on the subject, Barbara, there's one general remark I want to make. Unless a woman likes country life very much, in and for itself, I doubt if it's good for her."

He said this in rather a troubled voice, with his eyes in the grass.

Barbara glanced at him. She knew that he must be thinking of his mother, and she was transiently at a loss how to answer him. But she presently followed out his suggested idea with spontaneous interest.

"My mother was very quiet," she mused. "Yet every one says she was a lively young girl. Do you suppose——"

"Yes, I do," answered William. "She had a lot of the Rogers in her. And, though she loved your father and would never have chosen any other life than just the one she led, still I always thought that the mountains and the silence weighed on her. She grew quieter every year."

"Dear me! I wonder." There were tears in Barbara's eyes. "But, after all, she chose it."

"Yes, and she was happy," said William. "Fortunately, the depression—if that's what it was—subdued instead of irritating her. It frets some people intolerably, so that they quite lose control of themselves. That's pretty bad."

Again he averted his eyes, and again Barbara hesitated.

"Is it worse with women than with men?" she asked by and by.

"Yes," he answered, "naturally. Their work turns them in on themselves, while a man's takes him out in the open, makes him forget himself. Anyway, women are more thoughtful than men."

"Poor women!"

Barbara spoke dreamily. Before her inner vision rose forms and faces of her country sisters, worn more with loneliness than with toil, heavy with silence, slow with patience which, seeing no possible end to its waiting, had settled down into despair. How she understood them! It was not that their lives lacked the great primal blessings: love, work, health, and comfort and service. It was that they were cut off from the general stream of progress, chained to monotony, fettered to themselves. People need aid from one another in order that they may grow—much aid, insistent aid, pushing and prodding as well as beckoning. Instinctively, Barbara put out her hands and drew a long breath.

"You see," said William, watching her and waiting for the right moment to speak, "you mustn't bind yourself to the future until you are quite sure you know what it ought to be."

He had conquered her easily. Well, he was used to conquering Barbara. Perhaps the source of his influence lay rather in habit, in the familiar dominance of his nature over hers, than in any argument which he had adduced. Her own hidden instinct was prompt to second his endeavor. Nevertheless, he knew that his suggested arguments had been good, and he was glad to have had a chance to instil them. With some complacency, he left them to work in her mind.

As they descended the hill toward the homestead, he was not at all above feeling gratification in the sight

of Dick, lurking and dodging about the barnyard, pretending not to notice their approach. He was even malicious enough to delay their return by stopping to pick some wild strawberries for Barbára; and he helped her over a stone wall with unnecessary care. His greeting of the younger man was more cordial than it had ever been before.

"I just came and carried Barbara off," he said, in a tone of sufficient explanation, matter of fact and masterful. "She looked rather tired; I thought she needed a walk."

"But you can have your turn now," his manner implied. "Oh, don't mention it!"

"Barbara!"

Dick abandoned all his pretenses of preoccupation with a sagging barn door. His handsome young face was flushed and pleading—all the more attractive for the gleam of impatience in his eyes. He came forward and confronted his cousin.

"That's a very disagreeable man," he said irrepressibly, though with evident self-control. "The impudence of him! But that's not what I've been waiting all these hours to say. Barbara, won't you change your mind? Won't you marry me?"

Barbara drew herself up.

"Why, he's not disagreeable at all," she replied. "How dare you say so? Nor impudent! Please stand aside. It's late, and I must get supper."

She seemed not even to have heard the end of her cousin's speech. There was nothing for him to do but go and wrench the barn door bodily from its hinges.

VIII

THAT evening Barbara went to her room as soon as the supper dishes were finished and sat by her window, watching the clear gold sunset fade behind the western hill. She wanted to get away from Dick, and she wanted to think about what William Sloan had said to her that afternoon. Her mind had a whole new realm of possibility to explore.

Go away: could she go away? She had never supposed that she could, and so had never stopped to analyze her lurking restlessness. Did she want to go away? The amber sky opened immeasurably before her, luring, beckoning. There was a cleft in the hill just where the sun had gone down, and the wide world lay beyond it. Yes, surely, she wanted to go. Swift-er than departing sunlight her fancy flew forth over those unknown lands and seas, reveling in them. Of course she wanted to go. But when she turned with a sigh—because Dick had come out in the yard, and she was afraid that he would look up and see her—when she turned from the window and saw her familiar room pressing around her, quiet and shadowy and full of things that were the symbols of permanence, she shook her head. Involuntarily she put out her hand and caressed a corner of a little dressing-table that had belonged to her great-grandmother.

Before he went to bed her father came to her door; and, rising and lighting a candle, she saw that he was, for the first time in his life, gravely angry with her.

"This is no way to treat a visitor, let alone a cousin," he said. "I'm ashamed of you. What is the matter? Why didn't you come down?"

"Oh, father!" She hesitated. "I can't!" she declared at last. "He makes me miserable. If he really—likes me, why doesn't he go away and leave me in peace?"

"You're a spoiled child," Henry stated roundly. "I've the greatest mind in the world to wash my hands of you. I shall certainly advise Dick to do so."

"Do, father!" breathed Barbara.

"But you needn't think that I'm going to forget how you've acted," Henry went on, with incomplete coherence but with what Barbara found perfect clarity. "I shan't forgive you. I can't."

"Well, father," Barbara acquiesced despondently; and increased his annoyance.

It was an unhappy situation, and very discouraging. Neither father nor daughter saw a way out of it. The constraint at the breakfast table next morning was glacierlike. But Dick saved the day in a manner that reflected credit on himself; and took the afternoon train. The manly dignity of his departure made every one in the homestead like him better than ever before. Which was hard on Henry. He had not really needed to like his young kinsman better. He stood looking after the retreating buggy (Reuben drove his cousin to the train) with the bitter realization

that one of the fairest, most promising hopes of his life had been frustrated. He turned away without so much as a glance in Barbara's direction.

The end of a family jar is generally much more trying than its beginning. People get tangled in their own perversity, and do not know how to get out. Henry was tied hand and foot. His vexation soon turned into a restless unhappiness, but he maintained his front of severe displeasure. He treated Barbara with a cold, elaborate forbearance which froze his own heart. He did not clearly understand what was the matter with him. He had never before been forlorn in just this way.

But he did not have much time to worry and brood after Dick's departure; for Barbara's mental outfit possessed the one natural weapon adapted to make short work of difficult knots: she was frankly generous. Relief worked in her irrepressibly. Not even her father's coldness could spoil her sense of escape and freedom, the joy of her great deliverance. She sang as she worked in her kitchen next morning; and when the dinner hour found Henry still grave and distant, she took a resolute initiative. Stealing up behind him in the woodshed, she put both arms about his neck and laid her cheek against his.

"Father! Father!" she murmured. "I love you very much."

What can one do with a woman like that? Standing on one's dignity is a difficult process when one has two arms tight about one's neck, and when one can look nowhere save into a beautiful, pleading face, in-

finitely endearing. Henry tried to squirm himself free. But squirming is not dignified, either. Then he tried to speak sharply: "Barbara!" But his voice broke. Finally he gave up, and encircled his daughter with the hoe and the rake which he happened to hold in his hands when she surprised him. She clung still closer to him, and sang, "Oh! I am glad; I am glad!"

Nevertheless, this was not all that there was to the reconciliation. Barbara herself would not have thought a disagreement honored that could be so lightly dismissed. In the evening, with great dignity on her own part, she invited a full and free discussion of the difficulty.

She was quiet and grave by this time. As she and her father sat on the front steps, the summer dusk deepened about them. Above them, the elm trees stirred, sighing softly and making room among their shadowy branches for the imminent stars. The old house behind them breathed softly, too. Barbara thoughtfully leaned her cheek against one of the square wooden pillars. With her eager hands folded in her lap and her swift eyebrows and mouth concealed, she looked an integral part of her dwelling, the immutable humanity that the immutable roof and walls depended on for their meaning.

"Father," she said at last soberly, "I'm sorry that you were disappointed."

"Well, I'm sorry too, Barbara," he answered her.

"But it couldn't be helped. I didn't—like him."

She emphasized the lukewarm verb, and made it frigid.

"Don't you like any one, Barbara?"

There was a half wistful note in her father's baffled voice. He peered at his daughter through the dusk, trying to read the riddle that her complex young womanhood was to his sturdy, masculine middle-age.

"No, father."

Barbara frowned, and the swift motion informed her voice. But then she looked up.

"I like you, daddy," she said, and this time the word glowed. "That's enough, isn't it?"

"Not quite, Barbara." Henry's voice acknowledged the tribute, while at the same time it avoided concession. "You see, Reuben really is going to marry Jennie; and I really am growing old." He reminded her of the argument of a few evenings before.

"I'm going to tell you something, girl," he went on soberly, when Barbara, for a minute, found nothing to say. "It's not very nice. You won't like it. I never liked it myself, and now I hate it. But yesterday I had serious thoughts of changing my will and leaving the homestead to Reuben."

"Father!"

The cry broke forth so involuntarily that it seemed an expression of the evening sky. For days afterwards it echoed in the bewildered ears of him who heard it and in the no less startled ears of her who uttered it. It was rapturous, grateful; it had the release of a singing arrow; it carried utter conviction.

Alas! it smote the father's heart with a wound which only an arrow can give.

"Barbara!"

She came to herself when she heard him speak so forlornly, and found that she was standing on the topmost step. How had she come here? She did not remember springing to her feet. She sat down at once. For a minute or two the rush of the waters of her instinctive mood was so loud in her ears that she could not think clearly, could not regain control of herself. Not in all her self-conscious life had she been so bewildered. But her father's silence urged her. She turned and smiled uncertainly at him. Even through the dusk he caught the penitence of her eyes.

"That was funny, wasn't it?" she said. "I guess I didn't know what I was doing."

"But you'd really be glad if I were to leave the old place to Reuben?"

Henry was not going to shirk the probing of his wound, even though the obvious, flaunting arrow might seem to render further investigation quite unnecessary. Barbara gratified him by pulling out the arrow and throwing it away.

"I want to do just what you want to have me," she said, moving up near him and clasping her hands over his knee. "Everything except—marrying, please. Let Reuben bring Jennie here to live. That will make things all right."

"Would you like that?"

Henry put his hand awkwardly on his daughter's head and stroked her hair the wrong way.

"No."

"Nor I, either."

They both laughed with the endearing mutual sympathy of a guilty confession. Then—rare event in the annals of their race—Henry bent his head and they kissed each other.

The months which followed were among the happiest in Barbara's girlhood. Perhaps they were the most contented which she had ever known. The reaction from her rebellion filled her with a very fire of obedience and devotion. She could not do enough to show her love for her father. Her sense of escape from a lot which would have been hateful to her made her look upon all other possible lots as good. She had certainly never loved her old home half so well. She busied herself, not only with the faithful performance of all her usual tasks, but with the devising and achieving of new undertakings. She coaxed her father for some rolls of wall paper for the parlor and bedrooms; she painted the woodwork of the kitchen, and made some new curtains for the windows. The occupation of hemming the latter seemed to bear her more deeply down and back into the life of her home than she had ever been before. Sitting by one of the kitchen windows, she gave herself over to the spell which a rhythmic needle is so mysteriously potent to evoke; and, as her hand went back and forth and her eyes dwelt on her task, she felt the room and the house and the whole of existence widen around her. Presences lurked at her elbow, footsteps stirred in the corners. She did not look up.

Not for anything would she have disturbed the communion which the whole house was. When she emerged from these trancelike sessions her eyes were as still as a mountain lake, and even the strong bow of her mouth was softened.

The old house seemed gentler than ever before. Perhaps it was the effect of the new papers that made the rooms appear less gloomy; perhaps it was the pervasive stir of her own animation that quickened the atmosphere. After all, she reflected, every woman impresses herself on the environment to which she gives her hearty attention. This was her home now, not her grandmother's, nor even her mother's. She must see to it that the experienced, versatile old walls learned to express her individuality.

It was significant that, when she rearranged the parlor after its re-papering, she paused before the big sea shells for a long, troubled moment; then climbed up and placed them carefully on the highest shelf of the bookcase.

The garden flourished. She gave it all her spare time, and sometimes more than she could conveniently spare. She knew that that was the way to please gardens: to be extravagant with them, to let them feel that one is somewhat scanting one's other duties for them. She remembered the startled, guilty haste with which her mother used often to be caught preparing a tardy supper after having lost all track of time among her flower-beds. But here was the difference: Barbara never lost track of time in the garden, she always knew just what she was neglecting in

order to wield the trowel. Sometimes, when she stood up erect from her labors (there was none of Hester's lingering and relenting in her manner) and received full in her face the glow of the sunset, filling the gap in the western hill, she stood transfixed; and then, indeed, she lost track of time, lost track even of space and herself, was transported beyond the realm of the actual. But she always came back soon. With a sigh she picked up her gardening tools and went into the house to get supper.

Noting her zeal in the garden and not discerning its vicarious nature (how should such subtleties occur to him?), her father tried to engage her serious attention with the problems of the farm. He succeeded. She listened to him carefully, making intelligent comments, and now and then delighting him by suggesting improvements which he had never thought of.

"Good! I told you so, Barbara. You've got the keenest kind of a farmer in you. Oh! if only——"

But he checked himself. It would never do to hark back to his disappointment in losing his ideal son-in-law.

"Come down in the meadow with me to-morrow, and I'll show you what I mean about that fertilizer."

She tried her best to be interested. She followed and looked and pondered; she took her attention in both hands and held it face to face with phosphates. But when her father left her, to go and look at a sagging fence, and then came back to her, he found her seated on the ground with her hands clasped

about her knees and her eyes dreamily dwelling on the curves of the farthest hills.

"Have you noticed how the prairie-weed has begun to creep in here?" he asked her.

"No. Why, has it? Where?" she said, confusedly waking from her reverie, and casting her eyes about.

"You're sitting beside a bush of it," he answered rather drily.

He had his misgivings. He was too acute not to notice, as the weeks went by, that, although Barbara, challenged, was gratifyingly quick to respond, Barbara, left to herself, had no appearance of giving a thought to the farm. But he had rather more than his share of the Marshall pertinacity, and he hated nothing so much as giving up a careful plan. This particular plan was so admirable! He had matured it through such an accurate, far-reaching study of his two children's natures. Reuben was stupid, and Barbara was uncommonly clever: those were plain facts. The one, taking the farm, would at his death leave it no better than he had found it. The other, taking it (could she only learn to take it gladly), would so deal and experiment with it that it would grow beneath her hands.

"Pooh! there's no danger," Henry reassured himself. "She's young; she'll settle down. Even Hester had to have her fling. But I do wish she'd marry."

IX

WILLIAM shared that wish. He watched Barbara more closely than ever during the weeks of reaction that followed Dick's departure; and, for the first time in his life, he ventured to encourage shadowy hopes.

They were very shadowy. He turned his doubtful and reluctant eyes slowly away from them whenever they seemed about to take any definite shape. A dozen reasons sprang to warn him. But there is such a thing as cherishing hopes with an averted face and a denying hand; and William, looking the other way, let the dear shadows creep and gather at their will.

One of his reasons for being afraid to interrogate them was his dread of harming the friendship between Barbara and himself. He knew her so well! With all reverence he thought he divined in her a rather transcendent capacity for love; but it was a single thing. Only once would that flame be lighted; then it would never go out. William was humble. How could he suppose that he was the priest appointed to kindle that lamp? No, he was the servitor, the keeper of the door of the shrine (that was no mean function), the patient watcher and student of the daily mysteries. He must not endanger his privilege by arrogant presumption. If Barbara knew that he

loved her, and did not love him in turn, she would spurn him as she had just so successfully spurned Dick Marshall.

In truth, how rare was his privilege! He did not know much of the world, but he had read a good many books, and he understood that the relation between Barbara and himself was unusual. There was in it all the mystery of sex (even she, though unconsciously, must be affected by that), and all the frankness of long comradeship. They had grown into the friendship together, letting it shape itself about them, never once standing outside it and manipulating it. In the beginning there had been no natural doors of reserve in the little girl's heart; and, though there were plenty now, he, by his long inhabitation, stood inside them all. All? Yet she did not love him? No. Perhaps love knows itself by the opening of doors.

He, for his part, had doors enough, all yearning on their hinges and all unsolicited. Barbara had never tried to know him as he knew her. That was natural. She was too little, when their friendship began; and he had never had any choice but to keep on steadily being twelve years older than she. How should a child of twelve care about the private affairs of a man twice her age; or a girl of sixteen concern herself with the thoughts of a man of twenty-eight? Why, William began to turn gray at twenty-eight! Moreover, precisely like everything else, the tree of a friendship inclines as the twig is bent; and Barbara, having begun by looking to William for sympathy

and protection, went on doing so. He stood in the place of Providence to her. One does not generally suspect that Providence, in its turn, needs sympathy.

Well, anyway, it was all very sweet. He was content—or would have been so, if he could have freed the tail of his eye from those shadows. Barbara was growing up fast. She would soon come to sharing his books with him. Already she had responded to his hint at the abstract in their hillside conversation on the day of Dick's repulse. She was very intelligent, capable of thought and feeling beyond most girls of her age. Intellectual sympathies form a safe ground for intercourse—if one is a little on one's guard. William foresaw a sturdy future of quiet comradeship for Barbara and himself. If only—! There again came the phrase that checked everybody's prediction of Barbara's future. There were two "if only's" in this case; but William, being strong-handed, thought himself quite capable of dealing with one of them.

Nevertheless, he drifted into spending ever more and more time at the Marshall homestead. He could do this without exciting comment or even attention. He was as much at home as (ironical phrase!) one of the family. Barbara was always glad to see him. He liked and hated her matter-of-fact way of welcoming him. Sometimes it made him feel like the household dog, sometimes—more complacently—like the punctual afternoon sunlight, obtaining admission at the western window. All very nice, come right in; but nothing to be excited about. The point was that

he was freely admitted; he never had any hesitation about presenting himself. How did he find time? He did not; he made it. He never allowed his farm to encroach on the finer concerns of life; and he would have lost a whole crop of potatoes rather than fail to maintain his touch with Barbara. Of course, as a matter of fact, his sessions with her were largely in the evening, when her father sometimes joined in the talk, sometimes dozed in a corner, sometimes unconcernedly took himself off to bed.

But one afternoon he was sitting with her quite alone in the kitchen. The early November dusk, helped on by a cloudy sky, had given him a reasonable excuse for quitting his work. "I'll milk the cows after supper," he had annoyed his methodical mother by calling back over his shoulder.

Barbara was paring apples. The pan of glowing fruit in her lap became her admirably, but her strong, flexible fingers were making short work of it. William, watching her, absently counted each apple that disappeared as so much loss.

"Barbara," he said, breaking one of the long, friendly silences that were common with them, "how would you like to do some reading with me this winter?"

"Very much," Barbara answered, looking up brightly. "If I can bring myself to make friends with your books. I've always been jealous of them."

"Really, Barbara?"

William's face brightened like a boy's. He had not expected this answer, and he joyously let it car-

ry him around the conversational bend which he had been circumspectly approaching.

"You have been jealous?"

There was a slight but throbbing stress on the first word and the last.

Alas! however, as so often happens in this disappointing world, the bend in the river of thought disclosed nothing but the same level and unconcerned meadows with which William was already familiar. Barbara looked at him and drew her brows together; her eyes were friendly (oh, always friendly!), but puzzled and unresponsive.

"Well, of course not really," she hastened to explain politely.

"Well"—William's waters subsided into their usual uneventful flow; he mocked himself—"they have always been jealous of you. But I'm sure they'd be glad to make friends. Shall I bring one over tomorrow to try?"

"Yes, do."

Barbara finished her apples, and rose to arrange them in a baking pan and put them in the oven. Then she resumed her seat and took up some sewing.

"I shall like sharing my books with you," William began again, fixing his eye on another, perhaps more promising bend, and heading for it. "The new interest will enrich our friendship. It's such a beautiful friendship already. Isn't it, Barbara?"

"Why, yes, of course."

Barbara assented, as if to the proposition that the fire in the stove gave a pleasant warmth. She turned

an affectionate look on her friend, and then, he could have sworn (roundly, too!), bent the very same look on the cat that jumped up in her lap.

"It's rather unusual, Barbara," William persisted, although he held his breath at the risk he was running, "that a man and a woman should know each other as well as you and I do."

That was indeed a risk: that "man and woman," followed by that "you and I." Barbara frowned again. Doubtless she was unconscious of the swift motion, for her eyes remained as steadfast as ever; but the shadow crossed the blue depths like the flight of an eagle.

"It seems very natural to me," she said, with some distance in her voice.

William yielded his tentative purpose on the spot. The shadow and the distance were too much for him. He certainly had not advanced very far, but he made positive haste to retire, pulling himself back as if from some threatened disaster. There was the relief of escape, as well as the defeat of relinquishment, in the brisk tone with which he returned to the impersonal aspect of their theme.

"What would you like to read?" he inquired, intent on winning a cordial and unshadowed response.

"Oh! I don't know." Barbara pondered. "Yes, I do. A book of travels. Have you got one on India? I like India."

There was nothing the matter with the response. Clear and untroubled, her eyes dwelt on him; her spirit slid a friendly hand into his. But her sugges-

tion disappointed him. He had had Wordsworth's poems in mind, or Emerson's essays, or Thoreau's "Walden." He had not a single book of travels in his little library.

"I'll get one," he answered bravely, however. "I'll send for one right away. Meantime, how would you like to read Borrow's 'Lavengro'?"

He must just make up his mind—so he pondered on his way home in the twilight—to rest content with the riches he had, and not to risk them in any wild gamble for impossible gains. After all, this state of affairs was to be expected. He knew that he had a strong spirit; and the great Architect never fashions strong spirits without the obvious intention of placing burdens on them. He could bear it; oh, yes! He shrugged his shoulders, accurately adjusting them to some unseen load. He could bear anything.

At the door of his home his mother met him.

"You're late," she remarked. "As usual," she added. "I've milked the cows," she concluded, returning to the kitchen stove.

"Mother!"

William paused in protest. As there had been no note of service in her voice, so there was no gratitude in his. Vexation on both sides.

"I told you I was going to do that after supper."

"After supper's no proper time to do up chores. Especially when supper's so late as this."

"But what does that matter?"

"Everything matters that's not done properly."

It was not a pleasant home-coming; but, then, Wil-

liam was not accustomed to pleasant home-comings. His mother had never before outraged his masculine sense of independence by impinging on his domain of action; but she had seldom been at a loss for ways in which to annoy him. Did she do it on purpose? Who could tell? He shrugged his shoulders again, but this time not so much in resignation as in irritation.

"For my part, I don't think it was at all proper for you to do such work," he said severely, taking his place at the supper table.

The two confronted each other in silence, but did not look at each other. William's face was as cloudy as his mother's. For several minutes he let his displeasure ride him. But by and by his brow began to clear. He was a man, and the genial influence of his excellent supper soothed him.

"I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon," he said, looking up with an attempt at conciliation.

His mother, however, was every whit as much a woman as he was a man; and she was eating no supper at all. Hence she remained implacable.

"No, I haven't; I never have," she enunciated.

William said nothing more for a moment; then he laid down his knife and fork, and looked at his mother. As usual, he was beginning to regret his irritation.

"I'm sorry for that, mother," he said. "It doesn't seem right. Do you think there is anything I could do about it?"

His manner was anxious, puzzled, polite—some-

what the manner of a deprecating dog, aware that things are not going right, but uncertain how to mend them. Even his mother smiled sourly at it.

"Well, you might give me some of the time that you manage to take from your work for Barbara Marshall," she said, flatly and frankly.

There were no evasions and suggestions in Martha Sloan's method of dealing with crises. Sincerity was her key.

William flushed. His mood wavered in the balance. His mother was as perversely adept in flinging him back on vexation, when he tried to make amends to her, as if she really preferred to keep him an enemy. But supper or penitence (one or the other or both) wrought in him graciously to-night, and he finally answered her with a true ring of conciliation.

"All right. That's a happy suggestion. You're always so busy about the house that it never occurred to me that you'd like to have me bothering around. I can make time for a chat whenever you'd like to have me."

Whenever she'd like to have him! Martha, in turn, found her son adept in flinging her back on disappointment. She answered him bitterly.

"Thank you. Next time I have a spare half hour, I'll ring the bell."

"Do!"

William was innocent of offense. He thought the matter happily arranged.

"For the land's sake, William!" His mother could not stand her vexation another minute; it burst out

suddenly. "What business have you with spare half-hours? Let alone hours." She glanced at the clock. "This is a big farm. Your father was always at work on it from morning to night. I never saw him, except at meal times. I didn't expect to." She guarded herself against any possible charge of inconsistency. "I like to have a man do his work well; that's what he's made for. But you, with your books and your Barbara—do you know, William, that the fence is down in the south wood lot, and that the rats have gotten into the cornhouse, and that——"

She stopped. She realized that she had better not let her son know how closely she had lately been following up his obligations. She was not quite in time.

"Oh, mother!" The cloud returned to his forehead. "Of course I know it. Did you suppose I wasn't going to look after those things? I've ordered the wire for the fence, and a new kind of trap for the rats. I wish——"

"You'd mind your own business," was what he wanted to say; but he left his sentence in the air, with a fine interjectory stress on the last word; and, lighting his lantern, went out to the barn, his set lips and shoulders conveying the comment that, although women may elect to do a man's work for him, they always have to be followed up, lest they have not done it well.

Left alone in the kitchen, his mother went about her legitimate task of washing dishes. Her lips were as firmly set as her son's, but her eyes were more

fretful than displeased—restless, dissatisfied. Poor woman! To be left alone in the kitchen was her habitual lot—her past, her present, her future, her eternity. She hardly knew that she minded it. During her husband's lifetime she had, perhaps, not minded it much. Devotion to housework and farmwork had always been her accepted, unquestioned standard for human life; and, so long as her men folks toiled in their sphere, she was content to toil in hers. But she had never had many friends, and she had had only one child. He was a serious baby, soon maturing into a sturdy boy whom his father took with him out into the fields. Nobody had ever really shared Martha's kitchen with her. She was at last beginning to realize this. The very obvious frequentation of Barbara Marshall's kitchen brought the emptiness home to her.

Very well; she would endure it. She was not given to brooding; if she had ever gone far enough in the habit to think about it at all, she would have considered it a weak waste of time. Her method of dealing with life was as flat and frank as her method of dealing with people. She made no concessions; that was not the way. She set herself firmly against limitations, ignoring and defying them. No wonder she maddened them into hemming her ever more closely about.

She knew perfectly well what would happen this evening, but she refused to pay the event the tribute of deploring it. William would scrutinize every trace of her ministrations in the barn; some of her most painstaking efforts he would readjust. Then,

without returning to the house, he would again betake himself to the Marshall farm. Resolutely she got out her sewing and sat down by the lamp.

But, for once, the event failed to respond to her challenge. (If events are human—as why not?—it must have hated to disappoint her.) To her surprise, in five minutes, she heard William's step at the door.

"You didn't ring," he said, trying to give the occasion a jocular turn—he had had another attack of penitence in the barn—"but this looks like a spare half hour. Supposing we talk a while."

It was quite too bad! He was really doing his best; his intentions were honest and filial. At another time, under other circumstances, his mother might have greeted him with gratification. But now, of course, on the very heels (though perhaps it seemed rather on the impelling toe) of her complaint and his blundering response, his literal, good-natured obedience irritated her.

"No, I didn't ring," she remarked pointedly, without looking up.

William hesitated. His impulse was to shrug his shoulders and go away. But he had been thinking a good deal about his mother lately; and her recent remark had not given him his first occasion to take himself to task for leaving her so much alone. After a moment, he blew out his lantern and hung it on its nail.

"You don't mind, do you?" he said, sitting down in a big rocking-chair.

The event certainly must have been human, it took such a perverse delight in mocking these two people. "Talk a while?" But what was there to talk about? Not their neighbors, the Marshalls; not that unfortunate fence; not the narrow escape of the horse, Billy, whom Martha had tied by too long a rope and whom William had just found quietly engaged in hanging himself. William was not a great talker at best. He ransacked his brain rather desperately in the unrelenting face of the situation. His mother, plainly, was not disposed to help him out. Finally his gaze, roving the room in search of matter for comment—any banality would be better than this heavy silence—fell on a shelf of books in the corner, and at once a look of relief came into his eyes. Books! Of course! When had they ever failed to help a troubled heart that turned to them?

"Let's read aloud, mother," he said. "Or, rather, of course, I'll read, and you can go on sewing. Have you re-read David Copperfield lately?"

Had she re-read! What an ignorance of her tastes and habits the question implied! Martha Sloan had never been accustomed to find time for reading.

"No," she replied succinctly and drily.

William fetched the book.

But he had not read ten minutes before he knew that the experiment was a failure. There was not the slightest response on the part of his listener. Of course he had not expected smiles or comments from her; but he had expected that she would listen. Otherwise, really, what was the use of reading at all?

Her deportment was negatively inoffensive enough, she neither yawned nor fidgeted; but William had an increasing, uneasy conviction that she was not hearing a word. Presently he broke off and looked up.

"That was a vivid scene, wasn't it?" he inquired tentatively.

Martha's frankness did not desert her.

"I really haven't the least idea," she enunciated.

"I thought so." William laid the book on the edge of the table, and rose and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down at his mother. "You see, after all, you don't really want me to come and sit with you."

Martha made no reply, nor did she look up from her steady sewing.

"When I come for a chat, you have nothing to say; and, when I read aloud, you don't listen."

There was a frown between William's eyes, half puzzled, half indignant. He was beginning to find himself maddeningly at a loss in the face of this rigid unresponse.

"What are we going to do about it? Do say something, mother!"

Martha finished one pair of socks, rolling them neatly together; and put out her hand for another pair.

"I guess there's nothing to say," she articulated.

That was all. It was the ultimate truth. Fortunately William had the present grace to abide by it as fully as he recognized and admitted it. He opened his lips, then closed them firmly and turned away.

Out of the tail of her eye his mother saw him select another book from the shelf; then she heard him go up to his room and light his lamp.

Once more left alone, she did not drop her work and give herself over to her thoughts, as most women would have done. She went right on sewing, and her attitude and expression changed not one particle. Why should she yield to her own mood, when she yielded to nothing else in her environment? Thoughts were not her business in life; thoughts are idle and harmful and bitter. When she had quite finished her mending, she put her work-basket away, wound the clock, turned out the cat, and went to bed. In fifteen minutes thereafter she was sound asleep.

But one wonders whether such stoicism is as sensible as it seems. It locks the door in the face of any improvement. If Martha, tossing on a sleepless pillow, had said, "This is unendurable," might she not have arisen next day, intent on some remedy? As it was, the November moonlight illumined no face on any country pillow that was more hopelessly lacking in peace.

potatoes, with the pasture lands, the Marshall farm would prosper as never before.

"Yes, I believe really as never before," Henry confided to William. "Barbara's got go and grit. And a farm likes that."

When, therefore, on the eve of Reuben's marriage, she reverted to the old question of the inheritance, her father did not take her at all seriously.

"Sure? I should think so!" he answered her. "You're the farmer for this place. I'm going to drop into the background pretty soon, and let you take the lead. Then you'll either have to get married, or engage a hired girl," he ventured to assure her jocularly.

Barbara frowned. A shadow came over her face, and she turned away.

But Henry did not keep his word. How could he, loving his work as he did, accustomed through so many years, to hold the master's hand? When Reuben was gone, he made a pretense—which yet was honest enough, and so was no real pretense—of consulting Barbara, even of deferring to her judgment. But it was not noticeable that he took her advice when his opinion differed from hers, or that he abated any of his activity. Barbara understood him. She was not guiltless of humoring him, of indulging in a certain pretense of her own. He liked to think that she was sharing the management of the farm with him. Very well, she would let him think it; but she would not be so foolish as to disturb either him or herself by playing more than a nominal part.

As the spring came on, she had had a recurrence of her old restlessness (never, during the most pacific seasons, more than in abeyance), and William had noticed that she took a great many walks, that she found innumerable errands to do in the village and in the neighboring town. Henry had noticed this too; but he thought that the errands were genuine, and he approved of them. It was a housewifely prudence that led to the plan for re-stocking the kitchen pantry and the linen-closet. There was money enough to pay for the things; the farm was doing well. As for the long walks over the hills, might not an interest in the farm have something to do with them? It was no uncommon occurrence for the father to look up from his plowing or planting, and find his daughter standing beside him, smiling at him. Then with what pleasure he made haste to greet her, and explain to her what he was doing, and ask her if she approved, and consult her about the best disposition of the next field! Probably he never noticed that her eyes, when they were not intent on his face, spent much more time ranging the distant hills than studying the fields. Or, if he did, he thought little about it, just as he thought little of the fact that the girl seldom arrived on these visits from the direction of the homestead, but from the high slope of West Mountain, or from the edge of the woods.

When the flower garden began to quicken, Barbara's wanderings slackened. She went out each morning to greet the pushing tips of larkspur, hollyhocks and iris, as she would have gone to receive a message

from her mother; and, as soon as she could dispose of her housework—sometimes before she even tried to—she devoted herself to labor in the flower beds. This occupation, together with the spring housecleaning which the example of all her neighbors forced upon her, tided her over the spring into the sober summer. After Reuben's departure she settled down into a life of quiet companionship with her father.

He and she were boon comrades. Each loved the other above all things and all people else. They liked being alone together in the big, shadowy, brooding house. "Oh, daddy! aren't you glad Reuben didn't bring Jenny here?" she murmured often, when they sat on the front steps, or lighted the lamp in the kitchen and drew the curtain against the cold, rainy dusk. He patted her hand in silence. He was deeply content.

He even stopped hinting at her marriage. That was a source of relief and of secret amusement to her. Under the contagious influence of Reuben's and Jenny's marriage she had had an outspoken suitor or two with whom to reckon. They were quite "desirable"—good, sturdy, capable young men. It would have seemed that her father must embrace their cause. But, no; he was uneasy when they called; he was not at all considerate of them and interrupted their sessions.

"Daddy, dear," Barbara could not resist saying one evening, as a very disgruntled young man shot down the front steps and out through the gate, "I bless you for coming in just then; but you surprise me.

I thought you wanted me—well, to supply you with an assistant.”

“Oh, little daughter!” His arm circled her. “I’m an inconsistent, selfish old man. I like having you all to myself. I don’t want any rivals.”

William came and went as he chose. They were always glad to see him, and talked as unreservedly in his presence as when he was not there. Sometimes he read aloud. Henry then went to sleep on the lounge in the corner; but Barbara listened, with steady eyes bent on her sewing, and parted, eager lips. She was a capital listener. She made very few comments, but he felt the flow of her attention like a river on which his voice was securely launched. Frequently at the end of some passage of particular beauty their eyes met and dwelt on each other in silent congratulation.

“William,” she said once, following him to the door, as, finishing Carlyle’s essay on Dante and glancing at the uplifted hands of the clock, he took his leave, “a book like that is something like a mountain-top, isn’t it? I don’t need to take so many walks when you read to me.”

“Oh, good, Barbara!” William’s voice had a note of triumph. “That’s what I hoped would happen. After all, it’s your mind that wants to travel.”

“And yet, I don’t know”—Barbara retracted her concession—“you haven’t read me anything that has the sea in it. I guess that has to be a first-hand experience.”

She shook her head, and William went away, obscurely disappointed.

The old house was very benignant that summer. Barbara kept the doors and windows open, and invited the wind and the sunlight and the fragrance of the happy, healthy out-of-doors to range through the rooms. She brought flowers and grasses in from the fields, and set them on the grave old tables and shelves. Her conscious deliberate intention was to coax her dwelling out of the past tense into the present, to break up its heavy old mood and induce a lighter hearted toleration of the things of the passing hour.

All went very well with her. If only the subsiding waters had not been stirred by a new series of events! If only!

XI

TOWARDS the end of the summer, in the town hall, a traveling lecturer gave a talk on Italy. Public entertainments of any kind were rare in the valley; and though most of the farmer folk would probably have preferred to have the social opportunity take the shape of an acrobatic performance or a musical comedy, there was nobody who dreamed of missing the chance for diversion.

As soon as William saw the hand-bills posted in the village store, he hastened to give Barbara the pleasure of the anticipation. She sprang out of her chair (such impulsive motions had been infrequent with her of late), and her eyes changed from lakes into stars.

"Italy!" she cried.

For a moment William's heart misgave him. He had wanted to please Barbara, but it seemed to him that he had succeeded almost too well. Then he braced himself.

"Let's read up on the subject beforehand," he said. "I think there are a few books on Italy in the Public Library."

William and Henry and Barbara went to the lecture together. Henry was prepared to be bored, but he thought that he ought to lend the occasion the

dignity of his presence. William was troubled. He had tried to persuade his mother to come with them, and had been painfully baffled. But Barbara had contentment enough for three. She sat on the back seat of the open carriage and looked up at the stars, wondering if they would seem different to her when she came back from hearing about that other land which lay beneath their ken.

This it means to live in the country; that every pleasure which comes one's way is magnified to the utmost, so that one's capacity is alert, ready for its utmost too; that a meager entertainment is quite touchingly turned into surpassing bounty. Unless, indeed, one's faculties have been dulled by long disuse; and then precisely the opposite result obtains. William thought of these two conditions, watching Barbara and remembering his mother; and sighed, as he wondered if the former's beautiful eagerness would ever suffer the eclipse which had overtaken the latter. Barbara unresponsive and warped! Heaven forbid!

The three were early, and found good seats; but the hall filled rapidly after their arrival. Fathers of families, sobered by their Sunday collars, ushered in their wives and children, all likewise demure. Young men escorted their favored maidens, shy and self-conscious; with exaggerated carelessness they dropped into their seats. A number of small boys broke loose from their respective parents and herded together, giggling, on the back seat. Otherwise the silence was portentous.

The pale young lecturer, waiting at the foot of the platform, observed his audience with idly attentive eyes. It was quite familiar to him. He had addressed its precise counterpart in a score of villages during the spring and summer. It seemed to him that he could recognize the very same faces from place to place, certainly the same manners. He knew exactly what would happen now, in a few minutes, when he began to talk. The waiting figures would gather themselves into a rigid immobility, the stolid eyes would fix on his face a stare which not all his experience could save him from finding disconcerting, but which by and by he would be still more disconcerted to miss. In fifteen minutes a third of his hearers would have become blind and deaf to him, either frankly slumbering, or making such concentrated efforts to keep awake that they had no attention to spare.

Was it his fault? He always wondered, and then admitted that it would seem to be. But he knew that he did his best. He could not consent to cheapen and stunt his interpretation of Rome by an exclusive attention to gladiatorial combats, or Neroic horrors, or other melodramatic aspects of the great city's history. His lecturing was a high calling to him; he strove to make it as fine an art as possible.

He was a rather striking young man to look at: tall and very slender, with a tumultuous shock of yellow hair, surmounting a dreamy forehead, and unexpected dark eyes, smoldering underneath. His face was clean-shaven; the lips were full and very

gentle. It was always the women of his audiences that went to sleep last.

Barbara was no slower than her sister villagers to find him an interesting object of contemplation. She bent an eager gaze on him. This was partly because she expected such a boon of him; all the week she had hoped that he would give it, and now she knew he would. But probably he would not have seemed quite so attractive to her if he had been fat and sixty.

He did not return her glance for some time, because he did not notice her. He was absorbed in a mental struggle with the first paragraph of his lecture, trying to readjust it and make it more popular. His first glance over his audience had confirmed him in his conviction that this town was likely to care even less than most places about aqueducts and haunted plains and catacombs. But when the hour came for beginning, and his glass of water was solemnly placed on the table beside him, he gathered himself together and gave that quick, involuntary look in search of the "creative listener" which is habitual with all solicitors of the public.

Lo, he found her! He had never found her before, and he had certainly not expected to find her here. He had not even very clearly expected to find her anywhere. But he recognized her the minute he saw her; and his eyes widened and woke to welcome her. What an expression! Not rigid and fixed, not painfully detaining itself, not wavering into polite unconcern, not anything that he was used to; but eager, expectant, waiting only a chance to respond. Well!

He stepped to the edge of the platform, to get as near her as possible; and began to talk like a fountain bursting out of the rock. He abandoned his vapid reconstruction of his first paragraph as if he had never thought of it; and rendered his original version with a glow which made it a new thing.

It is hard to say to which of them the occasion was greater or more keenly exciting. To Barbara it was a longed-for, deferred, anticipated revelation of joy for which her spirit had thirsted. She drank breathlessly, forgetting herself through the very fulness of her self-realization. Oh! all the wide world beyond the valley—here it was, beautiful, fairer than she had supposed it could be. Here were the storied cities, instinct with the significance of the past, quick with the life of to-day. Here were the wonderful buildings, the dreamy old pictures, the marbles, the fountains, the magic ilex groves. Here were the rivers, the sweeping plains. And here, beyond all delight, was the sea, clasping the earth with its blue rhythmic spell of eternity. Tears came into her eyes. She was there, and yet she was not there. Her senses yearned on the track of her spirit and clamored to come up with it.

Daniel Pritchard, for his part, was blessed with his own especial kind of consummation. His lectures were no idle pastime with him, nor were they primarily a means of gaining a livelihood. He had been brought up in the country, and had early broken away from it, finding its lack of human stimulus and response intolerable. He had been fortunate in the way

in which freedom had come to him—through a natural working of circumstance, not through his own rebellion. So that he had gone forth joyously, with no compunctions. But memory had never let him alone. He could not forget how cramped and stifled he had once felt, nor ignore the fact that his old country companions were still in bondage. The death of the uncle who had freed him by claiming him as a traveling companion had left him with a small competence, sufficient to keep him forever roaming the wonderlands of the earth, if he so desired. But he could not be idle; he must have some sort of profession. Moreover, he must try to be of use in the world. Thinking about these things, as he lay in a hollow of the Roman Campagna one drowsy autumn day, it occurred to him that he might try the experiment of carrying Italy home to Vermont. At once he sat up with a sense of having found his career. Of course! That would justify his roaming, that would repay his grateful debt to his uncle, and the still more insistent debt which every one incurs who escapes a snare. He returned to his rooms, and without delay set himself to fashion a series of lectures; then he took an early spring steamer home, and began his experiment.

It had not been altogether successful. His glow of enthusiasm had not kindled a corresponding glow in the hearts—or certainly not in the faces—of his listeners. But perhaps he had expected too much. He had judged them all by the standard of his own old eagerness. What it would have meant to him,

six years ago, to have somebody stand up and give him an eye witness's description of Italy! He must reconstruct his ideas. Though he was disappointed, he was by no means discouraged. Whether these people knew it or not, they were stultified by their isolation; and whether or not they wanted to hear about Rome, it must be good for them to do so. A third of his audience slept, but with the other two-thirds he made every effort to share the treasures of his experience.

Barbara! Of course he did not know her name, nor anything about her. She was at first to him not even an individual woman, but only the listener whom he had imagined, whose eyes had been before him when he was writing his lectures, whose tangible reality he had lately been coming to doubt. It was true, then, there was such a person; he had not deluded himself. He felt a little (in all reverence) as the Magi may have felt, when they stood at last under the elusive star and all their gifts came tumbling out of their hands. The need of giving is more poignant than that of receiving; yes, doubtless, his was the greater joy that night.

But what a pity that he could not give two or three lectures at a time! What a pity (he vexed himself) that he had chosen this particular lecture to-night! He had written the one on the Sistine Chapel more peculiarly for her, and supremely that on the Roman gardens. As he talked he made discursive efforts to snatch at the skirts of all his discourses, with the result that he now and then tripped himself up rather

hopelessly. But he did not mind that. Oh! he must not fail to tell her how the Colosseum looked in the moonlight. When he had all but finished, he came running back to tell her about the rainbow in Saint Peter's fountain.

She took it all, everything, with her eyes intent on his, and her breath coming softly in her spellbound body. She was not aware of him as a man any more than he was aware of her as a woman. She was his listener, and he was her angel of revelation, her wings, bearing her to the country which she so dearly desired. Each was to the other, in fact, a sort of second self. She was the self he had saved from the mountains six years ago. He was the self she aspired to be; how she envied him!

When he stepped from the platform there was a universal burst of applause which astonished him. He had almost forgotten that he had any audience besides Barbara; and he had not expected applause from her, she was too far gone in dream. He glanced around quickly, stepped back and bowed, a flash of gratified pleasure lighting his face. See all these people! There was not one who betrayed the unmistakable, all too familiar signs of recent slumber. They were looking at him with intelligent eyes, and clapping lustily. What did it mean? Had he at last learned how to accomplish his purpose and communicate his enthusiasm? He was doubly grateful to Barbara, then. It was she who, by her response, had called forth his best endeavor, who had set him free

of his enterprise. He enveloped her still watchful face with a glance of gratitude.

Country audiences are shy about expressing their recognition of benefits. Daniel understood this. He remembered his own youthful, bolting exits from the church door on Sunday morning before he should find himself face to face with the minister and have to say something about the sermon. Therefore, to-night he stepped back from the platform, awaiting and avoiding the usual stampede for the door. But he did hope that Barbara would linger. Would she? Would she not? He kept his eye anxiously on her amidst the heads of the other people.

She hesitated. Perhaps she felt his mute appeal. But, after all, what could she say to thank him? What could any one say to express such gratitude as hers? She was not shy nor embarrassed; she was simply pervaded with silence.

Her father and William settled the question of her immediate conduct for her. They went up to speak to the lecturer, and naturally drew her along with them.

"We're greatly obliged to you," Henry said, speaking as if he represented the town. "You certainly gave us a good talk. Perhaps we'll see you here again some time."

"Perhaps you'll stay now," William put in. He had caught a flash in Daniel's eye which seemed to leap somewhat beyond the legitimate goal of response.

"I don't quite know," the young man murmured. "My plans are unsettled."

Then he turned to Barbara. She gave her hand confidently into his, and let her eyes dwell on his as they had dwelt all the evening. But neither he nor she found anything to say.

"A nice young fellow!" commented William, as they drove home through the starlight.

"Nice enough," answered Henry, somewhat grudgingly. "A little too pretty for me. I don't like such awfully good-looking chaps. Say, Will, I want to ask you about that new fertilizer. Do you find——"

And the two men were soon deep in agricultural talk.

Barbara heard and said nothing. She leaned back in her corner of the carriage and gave herself up to the spell of the stars, just as she had given herself two hours before. She found that she had been right in her expectation: they did look different to her now, entirely different. Vega flashed with a light which it borrowed from the Vestal Virgins; the curves of the constellations followed the line of the dome of Saint Peter's. Oh, that far city! It held the sum of all things for which she thirsted, and she longed after it with a concentrated desire. Rome! Rome! Yes, the sea was there too, just at the end of the winding river, just over beyond those vast, lonely plains, those grandly sweeping regions of silence and solitude. The sea and the plains and the distant hills; and, in the midst of them, that blue dome, those crowding palaces. She made haste to climb the slope of the nearest hill, and step to the nearest star. Thence she leaned eagerly. She had no consciousness of the

familiar environment through which she passed. Her spirit was free of the universe, and she exulted in it.

It was with a disconcerting surprise that, at the stopping of the carriage, she came to herself and looked up and saw her home looming before her. The dizzying rush of the leagues of blue air, through which her soul sped, returning, dazed and half blinded her. Involuntarily she put out her hand and clasped William's arm, trying to steady herself. He turned and looked at her. Did he understand? For the moment it did not greatly matter whether he did or not; for, in spite of her appeal, she was not thinking of him. She was gazing up at the homestead, confronting it face to face, and her attention was wholly given to it. Claimed by it, rather. It had an air of putting forth a command, of asserting a neglected but all the more inexorable right. It stood very dark underneath its big trees. There was no moon to-night, and the starlight seemed only to make apparent the gloom of the old walls. Through one of the windows a ruddy gleam from the kitchen stove gave the effect of a watchful eye. "Oh!" said Barbara under her breath. Before she went into the house, she stooped and picked a withered leaf from her mother's garden.

XII

THE next morning she was not surprised to see Daniel Pritchard come slowly up the road. She had not expected him, she had not even thought much about him; but as soon as she saw him she knew that his coming was a matter of course.

She had risen early, abandoning a bed that was a restless haunt of dreams. If one must be beset with fountains and domes and old ruins it is better to be on one's feet, mistress of one's faculties. Once up and dressed, she had been relieved to find that her household duties counteracted her visions somewhat, claiming her attention and steadying her. With swift energy she got the breakfast and made the bread. But when the dishes were washed and the loaves out of the oven, she wandered out into the garden. The house irked her; it seemed to dog her footsteps and watch her.

There was no work to be done in the garden; the plants were drowsing toward their winter sleep. Barbara picked a dry leaf here and there, fingered a belated blossom, lifted a drooping stalk. Then she went and sat down in a corner of the stone wall, clasping her hands about her knees and gazing dreamily off at the hazy blue hills. The autumn sunlight enveloped her, stealing through her thoughts and senses with a

healing caress. She had her back to the house, and had to turn her head to see Daniel; but she turned it spontaneously at the first sound of his approach.

"May I sit down?"

He stopped before her and stood looking down at her as if he had often before thus stopped and looked. His eyes in the morning sunlight gleamed and sparkled darkly.

"Yes, indeed."

She smiled up at him, and indicated a smooth flat stone, fit for a seat. Her informal friendliness equaled his. One would have thought that the two were lifelong comrades, meeting to resume a conversation unfinished the evening before.

"I'm glad to see you," she said simply. "And yet," she added at once, "I don't know but I'm a little sorry too. I'm rather tired and quiet this morning, and don't feel up to trying to thank you."

"Don't!" He dropped down on his stone, and deposited his wide, picturesque, foreign-looking hat on the grass beside him. "I don't want thanks. You ought to know that."

His tone implied a consummate intelligence on her part.

"Besides, it's the other way," he went on presently. "It's I who thank you."

No woman taxed with intuition likes to run any risk of refuting the charge. Barbara could not possibly know what her companion meant by his last remark; but he seemed to think that she ought to know, therefore she held her peace. He held his also.

Perhaps they suddenly realized that their abrupt plunge into intercourse was warranted by no acquaintance at all; and, as they had drawn together, so now, like two children, they stepped apart and mutely studied each other. At any rate, they said nothing for several minutes; and their two pairs of eyes dwelt on each other, attentive and curious.

"I'm going to tell you about it."

He came to the end of his hesitation as suddenly as he had fallen upon it, and reverted to his former manner. This time his tone implied that he found it absurd to try to go back of an initial spontaneity. He leaned against the stone wall and clasped his hands about one knee in an attitude that was oddly like Barbara's own. For all their structural differences, his face and hers were, for the next half hour, spiritual mirrors, the one to the other.

What he told her was, of course, the most interesting story which she had ever heard. Perhaps there is nothing which so enthralls any of us as a repetition of our own experience. That which we have already learned is the thing above all others which we delight in learning yet more profoundly; it is the perpetual fountain of wisdom to us. But we cannot learn very well alone. It is when somebody else shares and expounds our experience that we most vividly understand it. The image of the mirror holds true. Barbara had restlessly been herself all her life, but she had never fully seen and recognized herself until Daniel Pritchard's similar nature was held up before her.

He told her about his boyhood on a farm in another part of the state; about his wanderings—he, too, had been given to running away; about his eager study of geography and his reading of all the books of travel that came his way. He had been bolder and surer than she, as perhaps befitted his sex. His spells of truancy had carried him into most of the towns of his county; and he had never felt any compunctions nor any regrets.

"I always knew what I wanted to do, and I always hated the farm."

Nevertheless, he had a conscience; and he would probably have stayed at home to help his father, if his uncle had not needed and claimed him, if a solemn family conclave had not decided that he must go away.

"I tell you, that was a great day," he said, turning his eyes from the hills, where they had been roaming with Barbara's, and meeting her gaze directly. "I wonder if it will always seem the day of days to me."

Very rich in implications was this young man's flexible voice. This time it suggested that, although, up to the present moment, he had never doubted the past day's preëminence in his life, he suddenly realized that one great day does not hinder others from being greater. However, he went on, with scarcely a pause to feel the brushings of the new idea.

"I needn't try to describe it to you." ("No," breathed Barbara, clasping her knees.) "You can imagine how it would feel to have your dream suddenly given to you, full-rigged, ready for launching,

with nothing for you to do but step aboard and set sail. That figure is very exact; for my uncle was in Italy when he asked me to come to him, and I sailed the week after it was decided that I was to go."

"All alone?" cried Barbara.

Her voice took its turn at conveying implications. It pulsed with longing and envy and congratulation. Daniel smiled at her.

"Yes; wasn't I lucky?" he said. "I was all alone, and I went and stood in the bow of the ship. There gloomed the broad dark seas. I tell you, it was great!"

"Oh!" sighed Barbara. "Oh! I am"—generosity struggled with envy—"so very glad for you!" she finished triumphantly.

He went on rapidly from this point. His own generosity was stirred to spare her a too lavish flaunting of details. He sketched in the history of the next five years: his world-wide travels with his uncle—east and west and north and south, returning always to Italy for rest of body and soul; his eager reading of books, and study of pictures, and hearing of music; his glorying—yes, he could not quite spare her that—his glorying in the expansion and growth of his own spirit, as it fed on the revelations of other spirits, the stateliest and the brightest that the world has known.

"Growth: that's the one thing, isn't it?" he said, fixing her with eyes in which the remembered experience, living again, burned excitedly. "It's what

we're made for. And how can we grow unless we are taught?"

Involuntarily he swept the silent valley and the circling unresponsive hills with a glance of hopeless challenge; then turned to Barbara with swift apology.

"Forgive me!" said his look.

"Well, why don't you teach us now?"

Barbara spoke after a long minute's silence, during which she seemed to be struggling with a conflict of moods. Her face was stormy. Her brows were swift, level wings, her cheeks were flushed and her mouth was tense; only her eyes (and they puzzled Daniel) were quiet and deep. Very wistful and wide, those eyes, but strangely undisturbed. When she spoke they had a little gleam of triumphing obscurely.

"Exactly! Precisely!" His expression changed to meet the adjustment of hers, and he shifted his position a little, facing her more squarely. "That brings me back to the starting point, to what I began by wanting to tell you. It's with the purpose of teaching people—so far as I can and they are willing to learn—that I have come home from Italy now. You see"—he instructed her, not as if he thought that she did not understand, but as if he craved the satisfaction of explaining to her—"it's the growth of the whole world that really matters, of all of us together. No man can go very far alone. He needs to be taught, and he needs to teach, sharing with others what he has learned. So we save time for each other and help each other along. I want to do my part. Receiving

without giving is, after a certain point, a tormenting business."

"Yes, I suppose so." Barbara nodded. "Well"—she spread out her hands—"you can give to me."

His eyes embraced her.

"God bless you," he said. "I see that I can, and I have no words with which to tell you how grateful I am. You can perhaps understand, when I assure you that you are the first listener I have found in all these weeks."

"Not really?"

Barbara looked both puzzled and pleased.

"Really." He nodded soberly. "I tell you, it feels good."

"What's been the matter?"

"My fault, I suppose." He knit his brows thoughtfully. "I've done my best, but I haven't seemed to know how to get in touch with my audience. It takes two to tell the truth; perhaps it takes two to tell anything—one to speak and one to listen. I spoke as soon as I found a listener, didn't I, now?"

"Indeed, you did!" she answered.

"I suppose, as a matter of fact," he went on slowly, "that there aren't many country born and bred people who feel the way we do about the outside world."

"Oh! don't you think so?" Barbara said, waking from a troubled revery. "I think there are lots of them; only they don't know what's the matter with them. And there"—the shadow on her face deepened—"there comes in the question whether it's really wise to tell them."

He scrutinized her in silence a minute. It was evident that her mood had changed. The swiftness had gone from her brows, they were brooding and hovering now; the eager color had ebbed from her cheeks, and her eyes were clouded. What was the matter? He saw her glance furtively over her shoulder in the direction of the house.

"Don't you think it's always well," he went on, feeling his way and watching her, "to make people discontented; and if you find them already in that healthy condition, to do your best to help them find out what's the matter with them?"

But Barbara was no longer his ideal listener; she was, in fact, apparently not listening at all. Instead, she had gone in for wholesale brooding—eyes and eyebrows, mouth and drooping shoulders. Releasing her knees from the clasp of her arms, she propped her elbow on one of them and leaned her chin in her hand. Slowly and deliberately her gaze explored the ancestral acres around her, dwelling now on a hillside, now on a field, now on a group of farm buildings. She had an inexorable air of turning from cloudy visions to review the facts of life.

"I rather think," she said at length, pondering each word, "that I had better not let you teach me anything, after all."

"Oh, but, Miss Marshall!" Daniel's voice was charged with dismay. His eyes implored her unanswering profile. "But—but—" he stammered, "I don't understand. Why not? I have to. I wrote all

my lectures for you. I—won't you please tell me why?"

Barbara turned on him the same look with which she had just been surveying the meadows, and studied him thoughtfully. She caught herself wishing that he were William, then he would understand; but at once she smiled at this notion. How could he be William?

"I'm afraid I can't possibly tell you," she said with a reluctant sigh. "It's a question of roots and wings. You don't seem ever to have been troubled with roots."

"I never heard of a creature who had both roots and wings," he responded slowly.

"I have both!" she answered.

"See here." He admonished her with a look that was quite as inexorable as hers had been a few minutes before. "I don't care anything about your roots. Wings are my business. I'm going to be your wing specialist. Tonic and exercise are all you need to develop as glorious a pair as I have ever seen."

Barbara laughed at this, and glanced over her shoulder, trying to see her own shoulder-blades. But the movement brought her again face to face with the house; and once more the light dropped out of her eyes, and her grave mood deepened.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "No. I'm sorry. No."

William came upon them, sitting thus—Barbara troubled and brooding, Daniel no less troubled but fired with scrutiny—and stopped and regarded them from a careful distance. For a heavy minute his

older face was troubled too; then something within it seemed to reach up and pluck the anxiety from his eyes, as one might haul down a flag of distress. The lines of his mouth set themselves. There in the pasture, beyond the stone wall, he came to some inner resolution which had the outward effect of solidifying his whole expression. He had already turned to go away when Barbara spied him.

"Oh, William!" She sprang to her feet. "Why, where are you going? Aren't you coming here? I've just been wishing you'd come."

"Well, I thought from your looks that you were in the Roman Campagna or on the dome of Saint Peter's, and I left my seven-leagued boots at home," he apologized, striding the stone wall in a manner to disprove his last words.

"We were planning a trip there," Daniel replied, seizing upon the occasion before Barbara could give it any turn which he might not like. "Won't you come with us?"

"Do, William."

Barbara's recent mood veered enough to let her fall in with Daniel's suggestion. She smiled invitingly at William.

"Well"—he smiled back at her—"thank you, I'll see about it. I'm pretty slow going, you know. But you have wings."

"Hooray!" shouted Daniel boyishly. "That's just what I've been telling her. But she insists that she has roots. She hasn't, has she? Mr. Sloan, you help me dig her out."

William sighed. Here was this perfect stranger instinctively appealing to him as the natural arbiter of Barbara's destiny; here was life making upon him the most ironical of demands: that he turn his lady away from him, that he bring about the undoing of his own dearest hopes. What did they think him? A stone? Very well, then; he would be a staunch stone, he would let them build the house of their dreams securely on him.

"Her wings are much stronger than her roots," he said authoritatively (he might as well get what satisfaction he could from the full assertion of his power), "but she has to be taught to trust them."

"Again, just what I said," cried Daniel. "We'll teach her together, shall we, Mr. Sloan?"

His dreamy poet's eyes were very young and eager. William looked into them, measuring him. Then he looked over at Barbara, standing erect, her head thrown back, her eyes at grapples with the windows of her house.

"I'll have to do all the work, my boy," thought the older man; "and under the circumstances that's asking a good deal. However——"

"Very well," he assented.

XIII

BARBARA'S friendship with Daniel was the first serious cloud that had ever come between her father and herself. Her refusal to marry Dick Marshall had been a negative issue, entailing no positive consequences. But Henry felt that real danger lurked in the new relationship.

He could not be expected to like the young man. Dreamers and farmers do not often see eye to eye.

"Ignorant fellow!" he muttered, at first not quite venturing into open speech, but managing to make his murmurs sufficiently distinct. "It's a disgrace for him to pretend that he was brought up on a farm. Why, he can't even back a wagon into the barn."

"Barbara, he's a fool," he said later, growing bolder with his increasing alarm and with his daughter's silence. "I can't stand it to have him coming here all the time. Why don't you stop it? I should think he'd bore you to death."

"No, he doesn't bore me."

Barbara was a good deal more troubled than vexed. She had never been vexed with her father, she did not know how to begin. But she did not yield to his inhospitable suggestions, for her need was as great as her innocence; and she trusted that time and habit would adjust the situation.

Daniel did in truth come very often—sometimes every other day, sometimes oftener. At first he presented himself in the evening; but Henry was such a ubiquitous presence and such an interrupting one that by and by the young man took to dropping in during the afternoon. This interfered with Barbara's housework, obliging her either to scant it or to annoy her father by finishing it in the evening; and so did not obviate difficulties as fully as it was intended to.

Barbara did not try to influence developments. Hands off from that which is precious! It lies on the knees of the gods. More and more her spirit came to depend on Daniel's visits, and her mind to anticipate and remember them. Wings? She had them. They grew fast, developing a power to mount with her, the minute she heard Daniel's step at the door. Then away they carried her; and, when he entered, he frequently found her already gone, already waiting for him on the shore of some distant sea or in the dusky nave of some cathedral.

She was more than his listener; she was more than anything he had thought a pupil could be. Sometimes, instead of learning and following, she taught and led. She made him feel for the first time the significance of many a familiar thing. So that, to him too, their hours together were richer in meaning than he had expected.

Their relation was wholly spiritual. They thought of and talked to each other in terms of seas and cypresses, fountains and bridges, cathedrals, palaces. It was part of their likeness of nature that they both

guarded cold, white, unlighted altars in their unvisited souls. He looked in her eyes to catch the reflections of the Chartres windows; and she looked in his to trace the spring of a Gothic arch.

He was very systematic with her, saving her from the mistakes which his own unaided, both-handed snatching at knowledge had made. Step by step, from the first principles of architecture, painting, and sculpture, he led her along to full appreciation of the intricate glories whose photographic representations strewed the kitchen table. She followed obediently. Sometimes her eagerness showed her a short cut which he had not discovered; she was nimbler than he.

Wonderful hours! The homestead expanded (grudgingly, doubtless!) to let in an ancient city. The mountains outside the window dissolved, giving place to the desert or ocean. The very fire in the kitchen stove glowed *Ætna* or *Vesuvius*. Barbara's soul went beyond all bounds, and reveled and exulted.

But then came the evening; and in exact proportion to her anticipation of the afternoon was her dread of the evening hours. Her father was now almost never the genial comrade that he used to be. Instead of discussing the details of the day's happenings, he either avoided them so conspicuously that they loomed out of all proportion gigantic, or handled them roughly and summarily. "That fellow been here again? Umph! Well, I thought so." Barbara was almost afraid of him. Loving him dearly, she had always stood in deep respect of him; like her mother, she had been accustomed to defer to him. It hurt her and

frightened her to give him displeasure. But she had a strangely passive feeling that she could not help herself, that she was in the power of something stronger than either of them, something that was nothing less than the sweep of the river of life. She bore herself toward him submissively—which, perhaps, further exasperated him. Such silence and patience on the part of a child who is causing one infinite trouble smacks of insincerity. But no one who looked in Barbara's eyes could call her insincere. Henry avoided them.

Of course he was acting like a spoiled child; but, then, he was spoiled, and not altogether by his own fault. Dominant natures, especially when they are loved, find the world only too ready to humor them. His life had obeyed him (he would have liked to see it try to do anything else!); Hester had obeyed him (though her love would have preferred to call the agreement one of sympathy); it was not strange that he expected his child to meet and fulfil the ultimate purpose of his heart. Surely, it was a worthy purpose: nothing less than the carrying on of the work which he had developed, to which he had given his life. Its importance was proved by the fact that he had thus devoted himself; naturally, nothing seemed to him quite so essential as its continuance.

There was, therefore, excuse for them both in the sad alienation which grew between them. There is always excuse for the bitterness of those who love each other, but fail to see things in the same light.

Barbara took counsel with William. She surprised

herself by doing this; for, thinking the matter over, she had come to the conclusion that here at last was a difficulty which she could not share with him. It was too delicate, too intricate, too charged with possible implications which one would rather not recognize. Loyalty on one side, maidenly reserve on the other, seemed to seal her lips. Admirable resolution! It was possible, perhaps highly commendable, to reason so austere; but one meeting with her old friend on the hillside, one glance from his kind eyes, turned all her confidence loose in its familiar channel.

"What shall I ever do, William?" she said, sitting down abruptly on a rock. "Father's so displeased with me!"

Tears stood in her eyes.

"Yes, I know."

William sat down more slowly, sighing and frowning a little. Perhaps he too had decided that this matter was not open to discussion.

"Has he told you about it?"

"No, he hasn't; and I don't like that. He has always talked things over with me, especially"—he lifted one eyebrow at her—"things that concern you."

"Well, what shall I do, William?"

William plucked two blades of grass and measured them against each other.

"You aren't doing anything, are you?"

"No; precisely!"

Barbara's tone implied that that was just the point. She gave him a glance of relief and gratitude.

"Well, I guess I'd keep on doing it," he counseled her.

Neither of them had yet hinted at the real cause of the trouble. Was it for him to speak? Was it for her? Was it for either of them? She took her courage in both hands. A deep flush rose from her throat and invaded her cheeks and forehead.

"I can't bear to think what he thinks," she confessed. Her mouth quivered, her eyebrows spread wings; only her eyes kept her to her task. "If he didn't act so, the idea would never have occurred to me. And it isn't true; William, you know it isn't true."

He did not look at her. Her eyes waited valiantly for him a minute; then, as he continued to spare them, they relaxed and softened. It was a pity that he could not have had the reward of reading their gratitude. But perhaps he saw more than he indicated. He knew Barbara's eyes pretty well by heart.

"It's Italy and France and the sea," he observed, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Of course! And England and Constantinople and Egypt and the whole world. Oh! nobody can imagine what it means to me to hear about these places. I've wanted them all my life, and now he comes and gives them to me."

This time William did look up, sharply. He knew that she was no longer looking at him, and he wanted to catch a glimpse of the spirit behind the glowing words. His own eyes softened (though there had not really been need of that) as he studied the rapt and

eager expression—parted lips, wide eyes, earnest brow. What Barbara's soul sprang thus utterly forth to welcome and take must be incontrovertibly her right. It was his loyal office as friend to see that she secured it. As for a possible unconscious complexity of desire, that was none of his business.

William liked Daniel. He met him not infrequently in the Marshall kitchen and in the neighboring fields. Two people can hardly haunt the same corner of a valley, especially when their errands are similar, without being more or less thrown together. Daniel liked William too. He found him slow but infallibly sure of response, friendly and patient and unobtrusive. Sometimes he listened intelligently to the discussions of Italy; sometimes he went away in the midst without interrupting them.

"A fine, good fellow!" Daniel broke off once to say, watching the stalwart, retreating back. "And how he loves you, doesn't he?"

"Why, yes, I suppose he does," Barbara assented, a little surprised.

But Daniel did not like the homestead.

"There's something strange about old houses," he said, coaxing Barbara out into the sere meadows one mild early winter afternoon, and drawing a breath of relief as a shoulder of the hill hid the house from sight. "Or, rather, I suppose it's not really strange at all, but inevitable. Your house has had a hundred years in which to gather personality from the people who have lived in it, and it has made the most of its time. It's a corker, isn't it?"

Barbara laughed. Her grave young friend did not often use slang.

"Sometimes I love it," she answered, with a vaguely defensive feeling in face of the unmistakable obloquy of the last epithet.

"Do you? Oh, no! you mustn't. It isn't your friend. That is—of course—I beg your pardon—I didn't mean——"

Daniel broke off helplessly. Barbara's eyes were flashing.

But she recovered herself in an instant, and laughed again.

"Of course you didn't. It's I who should beg your pardon," she said. "I don't know what got into me. Often I don't know what possesses me in my feelings and actions about that old house."

"I suppose it's a racial matter with you as well as with it," he replied thoughtfully, relieved at her swift return to friendliness. "You both have the same past behind you. It's funny you're not more alike. But you're not, you're *not* alike."

"Well, I don't know," Barbara pondered. "Sometimes we get on very well. We were capital friends all last summer. I really think it liked me a lot."

"And you?"

"Oh! I loved it. Yes, really. You see"—she hesitated, and her voice deepened—"there's my mother's garden. I loved my mother. And you may have noticed that I rather adore my father."

"Yes." Daniel sighed.

"I coaxed the old house till it gave over being so

absurdly mysterious and gloomy. The day I brought home the new curtains it actually smiled. And that evening, when I sat on the steps, waiting for father, it told me some very pretty stories."

"But now?"

"Oh, now"—it was Barbara's turn to sigh—"it is disappointed in me again. It sees that I really am not the kind of woman it wants me to be."

"You can't help it."

"I don't know." Once again Barbara demurred. "Don't you think I could if I tried?"

"No!" He wheeled about in front of her, and went walking backward, that he might directly face her. "That which you are, you are. God has made you so. He has given you wings. You mustn't clip them or fold them; you must spread and use them. That dark old house is no place for you. The sea is your place, Rome is your place, Egypt, Greece. You belong in the sunlight and the open. Barbara!" He had never called her by name before, and a slight pause followed and stressed the innovation. "Marry me and come away with me; that will set you free."

With one accord, they stopped walking and stood as if rooted in the hillside, staring at each other. The second pause which set in soon amounted to a huge silence. What had happened? His face was as thrillingly astonished as hers. In their wide young eyes there was a dazzled, groping wonder.

Barbara spoke first; her words tumbled out incoherently. She neither knew nor cared what she said,

her one desire being to stop the resonant echo of Daniel's last crashing utterance.

"Thank you—you're very kind—but, really, I—I— isn't it nearly supper time?—I think I'd better be going home. There's a short cut here, through this field, to the village. Please!"

He left her obediently, and not altogether reluctantly. His need of a chance for self-recovery was as great as hers. They gave each other a quick, shy glance, full of mutual query and solicitude; then parted without so much as a touching of hands.

That evening it happened that Henry Marshall decided to take his lurking trouble in hand and see if he could not shake it out of itself, forcibly compel it to loose its hold on him. Infelicitous moment! He could hardly have chosen it more unfortunately. Barbara's dreamy silence at the supper table ought to have warned him; and so it did, but only to exasperate him. He broke off in the midst of a monologue on the subject of winter logging, and laid down his knife and fork.

"See here, girl!" He startled his daughter into attention. "You're not hearing a word I say. You must listen to me. These things are important. Who's the head of this farm?"

"Why, you, father."

Barbara's softly waving wings drooped and shrank, as a familiar chill struck through them.

"Well, I tell you, I shan't be long. I'm ageing fast this winter. And when I'm gone——"

But Barbara slipped from her chair, and ran and knelt beside him, her face against his arm.

"Don't, father," she pleaded.

He held her away from him. In spite of himself, his voice softened, but it continued to speak the words which his will had set it.

"You simply must grow up, Barbara. You must stop fooling and dreaming and playing. Life's a serious business. Your life is right in your hand, if you only would take hold of it. You must take hold of it."

He waited for her answer. She could not say, "I am grown up. I have grown so fast that I can hardly keep pace with myself. And my life is not in my hand; it is over yonder, waiting and beckoning. Oh, let me go!" Her father would find nothing but folly in a speech like that. So, for a while she said nothing; and then, "Yes, father," she answered, as usual.

Later in the evening, when her father had been long in bed, and she herself had for some time been lying awake on her pillow, watching the moonlight steal across her bedroom floor, she rose and put on her wrapper and crept softly downstairs. In the dusky parlor she climbed on a chair and reached up and took one of the big pink sea-shells down from the shelf. With a caressing gesture she folded it in her hands and held it to her ear. For several minutes she stood motionless, listening, with her breath coming softly and her face glimmering pale in the shadows. Then she sighed and put the shell back and returned to her bed.

XIV

IF only she could have had a chance to prove those last words of submission, to act upon them a little and give them some weight! Thus Barbara thought in the days and weeks of agony that followed.

At breakfast, the morning after the outbreak, she was on the point of suggesting that she join her father in the wood lot as soon as her dishes were washed. But then she remembered that Daniel had left a wonderful book on Spain, and she hesitated. Before she had fully made up her mind, her father made it up for her by leaving the house. He did not say good-bye. She looked after him, wondering whether she would not run and exact some parting word. But he was in a mood which imposed a certain timidity on her; and again she hesitated until it was too late.

She thought it her just punishment that she could not read her book, that, when she sat down with it, though her eyes scanned the words, her thoughts refused to travel beyond the boundaries of the farm. Every few minutes she caught herself staring over the top of the page, riveted by some unknown obsession.

There was no one to warn her of the event, unless

Fido, the dog, may have softened the blow a little by his excited arrival at the door in the middle of the morning. Something had happened, some one was coming. She rose and looked out.

"He ain't dead!"

Doubtless the two farm hands thought this the most reassuring message they could shout across the yard, as they toiled to lift their heavy burden from the wood sled.

"But you'd better send for the doctor," they added simultaneously.

Not dead! Barbara soon discovered the comforting value of those at first paralyzing words.

"Oh! are you sure?" she cried sharply, as she bent over the helpless, huddled mass that had once been her father. It seemed to her that a more complete surrender to annihilation could hardly be imagined. Then, without waiting for an answer, she led the way into the house, swept back the covers from her father's bed, helped the men lay him in place, set one of them to undressing him, sent the other for the doctor, and brought hot water, brandy, ammonia—all in a swift, tense moment.

She was almost sorry when she perceived signs of returning consciousness. She wished that he would wait until the doctor came and administered something to soothe the pain which he must inevitably suffer. She could not bear to see him suffer; she set her teeth. But her experience with her mother had taught her what that gray pallor of the lips signified. She knew there was no time to lose. Therefore, when he strug-

gled to speak she dropped everything and bent her ear to his face.

"Father, it's Barbara," she said, thinking to help and steady his flickering mind.

In all his dire extremity, in his mounting anguish, he smiled at that. As if, being alive at all, he could fail to know Barbara! She caught a sob back just in time. Never had anything so touched and wrung her as that smile.

"Be—a—good—girl. Promise—father," he whispered painfully.

There was interrogation in his struggling voice.

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I promise, father. Forgive me."

Barbara laid her stricken head beside her father's, nearly as spent as he.

He did not speak again, he could not; but she felt his fingers feel feebly for hers, and knew that there was peace between them.

He was dead when the doctor arrived. There was nothing to do but send for Reuben, and make all the dreary arrangements for the last sad services.

Barbara wandered out into the garden. The neighbors had flocked to her, and had taken all her immediate responsibilities out of her hands. She was dazed. She did not know where she was going nor what she intended to do. One gray face filled the universe, and one murmur held her ears: "Be—a—good—girl; promise—father." "Oh, yes, father; yes!"

Quite of their own undirected accord her feet carried her across the sere winter lawn to the corner of

the stone wall where she had first talked with Daniel. And there she found him again; or, rather, he found her.

He had been watching the house from a distance, hesitating, uncertain what to do. Experienced as he was in some of the phases of life, he was in others quite ignorant; and simple, primitive, human sorrow was unfamiliar to him. He was afraid of it; rather, perhaps, he was afraid of himself in connection with it. When Barbara first came out of the house, though he fastened his gaze upon her, he still hesitated. He hoped that she would look up and see him and give him his cue. Then, when he saw that she had sat down on the stone wall, with her back to him, and was evidently plunged in a timeless revery, he drew near her, step by step, doubtful and troubled. When she heard him and lifted her eyes he was paralyzed by the expression of woe in her face. Staring at her, he stood helpless, completely at a loss.

Although she was looking directly at him, it was a full minute before she saw him. If he had realized this he might have been less dumfounded. Her wide eyes, stretched to their utmost with sorrow, focused themselves very slowly upon any concrete presence. But alas for him when she did see him!

"Oh! go away!"

She shrank as from an evil spirit.

"I think I hate you!"

Her eyes condemned and cast him out.

But perhaps it was well that she leaped at once to this extreme of feeling, and got it over with. For her

generosity could not allow her to hold to her revulsion in face of the blank dismay that met her in his eyes.

"Forgive me." She caught her breath on the first of the sobs that were at last swelling from her heart. "I didn't mean it. It was all my fault. Oh! please go away!"

William, striding over the meadows by the shortest cut from his house, did not stop to ask himself whether he was about to intrude between Daniel and Barbara, whether his third presence was wanted. If he had thought anything at all about third presences, he would undoubtedly have relegated Daniel to the ungrateful number. But his whole concern was for Barbara. He had just heard the news. He stepped over the wall and dismissed Daniel with as unconscious a brushing aside as if he had been a fly.

"Steady, now, Barbara! Steady!"

He took her hands from her face, partly that he might hold them in his, partly that he might leave her no refuge in which to let herself go. He believed that tears have more of madness than relief in them. He stood in front of her, shielding her from Daniel, but, for his own part, gazing down at her convulsed features with the fearlessness of one who knows that he can trust his love to meet every most helpless need of the beloved.

She stopped crying almost immediately. A few long, rending sobs shook her, and she leaned her forehead on William's hands, to steady herself. But she was soon quiet again.

"Thank you, William," she said, looking up. "I'm

all right now. I'll go back to the house and find something to do. Please come with me."

Daniel made his way out of the garden in a subdued and impotent state of mind. Was that the girl with whom he had lately been such close friends, whom he had only yesterday asked to marry him? Marry him? Well, she was free to do so now. And she was more beautiful than ever. But she had lost her wings. That august creature, seated on the stone wall, crowned with her grief, had as established an air as the house, seemed as deeply rooted as the elm trees. He was profoundly afraid of her. Yet, not for the lure of all the earth would he have left her neighborhood.

Late in the evening he was sitting in his little room in the village, when William came and knocked at his door.

"No, I can't stop," said the older man. "I came over on an errand, and must go right back. But I want to tell you that Barbara Marshall is going to need you greatly in a few days. I hope you won't fail her. You can probably do more than any one else to help her through the winter."

The voice that said this and the eyes that directed the words to their mark were full of a complex significance. They apologized for the high-handed ignoring of a few hours before; they deferred to a superior power which had been temporarily in abeyance; they sent out an appeal and a challenge for generous sympathy. Daniel met them responsively.

"I only want to be of service," he said, somewhat

thickly. "You may be sure I shall do the best I can. But you know her better than I. Won't you tell me when you think she'll be glad to see me?"

It was fortunate that the events of the day had somewhat dulled William's sense of humor. For, though a person may laugh at himself, when he sees in what a predicament life has placed him, the laughter implies perception, and hurts. Under the stress of the present need there seemed nothing remarkable to William in the commission to go and fetch another man to comfort his beloved. Why not? The point was that she be comforted.

XV

NOW!" said life to Barbara Marshall. "Now!"— and looked to its weapons. The time had come. She must give over her dallyings and uncertainties, and meet the issue squarely.

She realized this as soon as her father had been laid beside her mother and she returned to take up her existence in the old house.

Through some inadvertence on the part of her relatives it happened that she drove home alone from the cemetery: a situation which no well-meaning friend would have willingly permitted, but which was really more grateful than trying to her. She felt a great need of quiet, of re-self-possession. The coming and going, the weeping and waiting, the emotional tension of the last days had been bewildering to her. She wanted to gather herself together and face the circumstance which had shattered her. It was a comfort just to sit in the seclusion which an unshared carriage affords and let the old horse, Peter, take her slowly home.

But when she came to the turn in the road which gave her her first view of the homestead she found herself summoned to an encounter which she had not anticipated. "Now!" Yes, it was then that the conflict began.

Of course the thing was but a continuation of a lifelong struggle; there was nothing new in the challenge of the deep roof and the small, watchful window-panes. But continuations are precisely the forces that know how to startle us most, with the sudden turns they take, the crises at which they arrive. Barbara's house confronted her as if the two of them had met for the first time.

Well, that was natural. Even in her weary dismay she realized that her father's death made such a difference in her relations with the whole environment of her life that she had no choice but to take a new attitude towards everything. So long as her father had been alive, with his capable hand on the wheel of immediate circumstance, she and the homestead had deferred the issue which lay between them. Now they must take it up.

Come to think of it (thoughts come fast in moments of stress), she had done very little first-hand living. She had lived her mother's life, and her father's, taking their standards as she had found them, and doing her different (rather indifferent) best to conform to them. Now she was left to her own standards. In spite of her sorrow and loneliness, in spite of her soul's desolation, she felt a quick stab of exultation, as she realized that she was free to take hold of life directly, and—

"Steady! Steady!" said the old house. "Don't leave me out of your reckoning. If it's standards you're missing, I rather think that I have one or two with which I can supply you."

Alas for the dear stab! It ended in numbness. The standards of a whole race, precisely alike and of cumulative force, were held up before her by the sturdy old walls.

But she was so tired! Why could the house not have let her alone for a few days, have given her time to come to herself and take her bearings? It was not fair to waylay her thus, when she was uncommonly helpless through very lassitude. It was not wise, either. As Peter dragged her in through the gate she almost hated her home.

But that did not matter: love or hate. Obedience was what the house was after; and it knew enough to seize the outworks, to strike while the iron was hot. Barbara must not be allowed to come home and take up her new life under any misunderstanding of what was expected of her.

William had noticed her solitary departure from the cemetery; and, though he had acquiesced in it—reading her mood in her face—he had hurried across the fields to anticipate her return to the homestead. He came out from the barn door to meet her.

“William, how good of you!”

She yielded the reins to him, and sat watching him while he unharnessed the horse. Tears came into her eyes; but, when he paid no attention to them, they ebbed without overflowing. When he put out his hand to help her down she sprang of her own accord.

He let her take the first shock of entering the empty house, for he knew that the heart wants to honor solemn moments by realizing them. But he followed

close behind her; and, while she stood in the middle of the kitchen floor, looking slowly about her, he filled the tea-kettle.

"We didn't either of us have any dinner," he explained, when she glanced at him.

Then he let her make the tea and spread the bread and butter; and, though the eating of the little meal was but a poor pretense, the simple, everyday action served very mercifully to bridge the home-coming crisis. Nay, the occasion was more than a bridge, even more than a mutual service; to William, at least, there was in it a sacramental significance.

"Barbara, thus I pledge thee my life."

He said this, not with his lips, but with his heart, looking across the rim of his teacup at the girl's pale, serious face, and realizing the greatness of her present need.

Later in the day some neighbors came to see if she needed anything, offering to stay with her or to take her home with them. She refused their services. She had already secured the general house-worker whom she would now need as assistant and companion; and she preferred to be otherwise alone. Reuben and his wife stayed to supper and spent the evening. That was well. Specters—even Marshall specters—did not thrive in Reuben's solid presence. But his parting words made his sister's heart sink.

"I'll be around to-morrow to talk things over with you."

"Oh, Reuben! give her a few days, can't you?"

William interposed—he had also stayed on through the evening. “She’s pretty tired.”

Reuben set his jaw. Barbara thought that he looked not unlike the homestead as it had confronted her that afternoon.

“She’s got to be tired,” he said. “She don’t know what it means to be tired. She’s only played at life so far. But now she’s got to work; and the sooner she begins, the better.”

“Very well, Reuben.”

Again Barbara’s heart sank, as she heard herself utter the familiar words of acquiescence. Very well, father; very well, Reuben; very well, old house! Was she going to go on forever and ever repeating this formula?

William, watching her, set his own kindly and patient jaw in a way that was almost comically unusual with him. He went home by a circuitous route that led him directly past his own door and down to the village. Once more he presented himself on Daniel Pritchard’s threshold.

“She’ll need you to-morrow,” he said succinctly.

XVI

DANIEL was prompt in preparing to act on the welcome hint. No sooner had William left him than he turned to his photographs; and over them he sat long, brooding and planning. It had never before been his difficult privilege to undertake the kind of service which he had now in mind; but, little by little, he thought he saw his way clear. He had failed Barbara the other day. The memory hurt him; but, being sincere and humble, he was not so much discouraged as prompted to try again. If he could not comfort her, surely he could hit upon something outside himself, something vast and deep, that would do the gracious work. There was Rome. Surely Rome could help her. Rome could do everything.

Alone in his little room, by his midnight lamp, he hunted out pictures of grave old buildings, peaceful ruins, patient bridges and city gates that had seen the passing of much water and many people. He hung over views of the Pantheon, the Forum, the Colosseum, selecting aspects that showed them most calm and beneficent. They would tell his friend that sorrow and weariness only deepen and mellow life, that everything works in with everything else for beauty and truth. Also he chose a few trophies of old revolution and strife, that she might see how the will of man has

always had to ally itself with the Will of God. He had never been so thrilled by the possible beauty and greatness of his chosen mission as he was that evening. It might be a cure of souls.

But, his scheme of service being complete, waiting only its eager application, he hesitated. Should he go to her at once in the morning? No, she would be busy, she would not want him. He had a man's vague respect and concern for the domestic duties which seem to exact a woman's matutinal care. Moreover, he still stood in awe of her. He had not spoken to her nor brought himself to her notice since the morning of her father's death. At the funeral he had hovered on the outskirts of the little crowd of friends and relatives, watching and wishing, but venturing no demonstration. She had passed him on her way to her carriage; but she had not seen him, and he had made no sign. Her sorrow clothed her awfully to him. Would it still shroud her, now that the crisis was over and she had resumed her ordinary, daily life? He was afraid.

Therefore, it happened that he was not the first one to greet her on the threshold of the new life which she faced with the new day; his hand did not seize the initial chance. But, had he been ever so confident and prompt, he could probably not have outstripped Reuben. Moreover, second chances frequently prove as good as first ones, especially when the first ones have wrought a certain stress and havoc.

Barbara woke in the pale winter dawn. From her bed she could look into the sunset gap in the long line

of the near mountains. Nothing is colder and bleaker than a sunset gap in the dawn. The eastern sky was doubtless already pulsing and quickening with golden light, heralding warmth and cheer; but Barbara could not see that, and the west was pallid. It struck her with an intolerably chill dismay, very poignant in spite of its leaden weight. Oh, the silence and loneliness of it, the inexorable denial! She sat up in bed and made a gesture with her hands, as if she were pushing against some actual, physical incumbrance which threatened to crush her. Then she sprang out and began to dress.

Downstairs she ran out in the garden. Yes, there was the sunrise; the east was brimming with it. But it did not comfort her, as she had hoped. Rather, it gave her a fresh pang. The sun was coming, bringing another long day. How was she going to dispose of it, how fill its unsuggestive hours? She looked about her forlornly. There was no work for her in the garden; the ground was already frozen a little, and the flower-beds had long since been thatched for the winter. She glanced toward the kitchen. Her new handmaid, Priscilla Jones, was stirring among the kettles and pans, capably getting breakfast. Never mind, she would help her; she must do something. She could no longer face this immitigable sky, on the one hand imposing sunrise, on the other denying peace. She returned to the house and bestirred herself to such good purpose that breakfast was smoking on the table half an hour before the usual time, and Priscilla said,

"My! Miss Barb'ra, what a worker! I guess you don't need me much."

That was the truth, she reflected, as she elaborately made her bed and put her room in order. She did not need Priscilla, nor did she want her. Priscilla was a friendly soul, much given to conversation.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Barbara, sitting down in her cold little room, rather than return to the warm but too sociable kitchen. "Oh, dear! What am I going to do?"

"Get married," said Reuben later in the morning, when she propounded practically this same question to him.

He had arrived at the homestead as early as his chores would let him; and, knowing that he was inflexibly determined on the talk which he had suggested the evening before, his sister had led him into the unused parlor and had lighted a fire in the fireplace. The unaccustomed situation—turned out of their kitchen by a stranger—gave her a natural opportunity to voice her discontent.

"I don't need Priscilla. I don't want her. Why must I have her?"

"Because it wouldn't be right nor safe for you to live in the house alone."

There was impatience in Reuben's reply. The case was so obvious!

"Reuben, I really need the work."

Barbara knew that her brother's mind was closed to spiritual needs; he could not possibly understand what she meant. But her extremity seemed to leave

her no choice but to appeal to him. She turned to him from the hearth-stone, where she knelt with the tongs in her hand, and fastened pleading eyes on his severe young face. No use!

It was then that he told her that she had better marry.

"Doesn't John Andrews come here a good deal?" he suggested. "He's a first-rate farmer."

Barbara flushed hotly. She had kept her thoughts from any speculation over John's frequent visits. She had only known that she could never be anything but distantly polite to him, and she had noticed with some relief that he came more seldom lately. Reuben's crude question was offensive to her.

"Well, suit yourself," said her brother, shrugging his shoulders at the indignant look she flashed him. "But if you won't have a husband, you must have a hired girl. That's flat."

"I guess you won't find that time hangs heavy on your hands, anyway," he went on, with a gleam in his eye that might have been honestly meant for a rallying reassurance, but that freshly discouraged poor Barbara. "There will always be plenty for you to do. This is a big farm. There are some things to which you ought to give your attention at once. I came to tell you about them. Come and sit by the table; I have some papers for you to read."

Barbara obeyed mechanically. She was too tired and sad to resist; but she was also too preoccupied to give a careful attention. She rested her elbow on the edge of the table, leaning her head in her hand;

and absently followed the motions of her brother's pencil. He was pointing out clauses in a paper that referred to negotiations concerning the purchase of some land. Land? More land? But the farm already comprised several hundred acres. What could her father want with more land? Her father! Alas! The instinctive reference fell back from its empty goal, and hurt her cruelly. Well, Reuben, then. But Reuben had nothing to do with the farm any more. Where should she turn? She felt as if her spirit were running from one point to another, blindly trying to deposit a quite intolerable burden, and were all the time being steadily, quietly forced to stand still and adjust itself to the unwelcome load. She could not, would not bring herself to recognize her own obligation.

But, since she had to—! With a characteristic flash she suddenly accepted the responsibility and acted upon it.

"Yes, I understand," she said slowly. "This thing is now for me to decide. Very well, I decide not to make the purchase."

For a moment she faced Reuben as coldly and steadily as he faced her.

But the flash was quenched in a moment. For her to decide! So she might flatter herself; but the mandate of generations of Marshalls looked forth from Reuben's startled eyes, and echoed in his voice.

"I guess you'll take that back, Barbara. The purchase of this piece of land was one of our great-grandfather's plans. The whole family has worked

for it. Think a minute, and you'll remember how often father talked it over with you. It just completes our farm. Why, of course you've got to buy it."

He gathered up the papers, as if there were nothing more to be said, but also, nevertheless, as if there were danger that his impatience might seek a further outlet. He pulled his brows together with an effort at self-control.

"Barbara!" She was so mute that she exasperated him almost beyond endurance. "You simply must brace up and be a woman now!"

"I am a woman, Reuben." She knew that it was useless to say this, but again she seemed to have no choice. She spoke slowly, without looking up, her eyes on one of the sea shells that lay on the table before her. "A woman who longs to live her life, who longs to be free. Oh, Reuben, you take the farm, and let me go."

For a minute Reuben was silent. Doubtless his sufficiently simple and downright nature knew its own dubious struggle with complexity at this point. But loyalty won out.

"Not for anything in the world!" he said decidedly. "The farm is yours. Father wanted you to have it, and left it to you. Are you going to be faithless?"

He could not have chosen a better word to leave echoing behind him as he turned away. Alone by the fire, Barbara tried to stop her ears against it; but it hissed and murmured among her thoughts. Faith-

less! That is the attribute of one who proves false to a heritage, false to a trust, who refuses a tradition. All her fathers had worked to one end, each of them steadfastly receiving and transmitting the same enthusiasm; and here was she, shrinking and hesitating. She got up and tried to sign the papers committing her to the purchase of the land; but her hand shook from utter weariness, and she availed herself of the excuse to wait a while.

She was still sitting before the fire when, early in the afternoon, William dropped in. Priscilla met him at the kitchen door.

"She's in there," she said, jerking her thumb in the direction of the closed parlor door. "I don't know whether she'll want to see you or not, or whether you can get anything out of her. I can't. She ain't had no dinner, and she ain't done nothin' since breakfast but set and stare into the fire. I've seen folks in trouble before, but she don't act natural to me. She must have set a store by her father."

William nodded. He glanced around the kitchen. Priscilla had just finished her own dinner.

"Warm up a little of that soup," he said. "I'll take it in to her."

Barbara drank the soup passively. She said nothing to William, greeting him only with her gesture of tired acquiescence; and he did not bother her with question or comment. While she drank he replenished the fire and brought in an armful of wood. Then he gathered up Reuben's papers and put them away in a drawer of the table. After this, he moved a couple of

easy-chairs up to the fire. His air was one of preparation. For what? Barbara, watching him, wondered vaguely, without realizing that her interest was really quickened to the point of wonder. Finally, he stopped and stood beside her, looking down at her.

"Daniel Pritchard is coming to see you this afternoon," he said quietly.

For the first time that day, Barbara's eyes brightened and her eyebrows tried their wings a little. She looked as surprised as if she were receiving an entirely new idea. The truth was that she had quite forgotten Daniel; not since the day of her father's death had she given him a thought. But, being reminded of him now, she felt a sudden, lifting relief. Of course! He was the one she wanted and needed; he could take her out of herself, and so give her her only chance to rest and begin again. Involuntarily she put her hand to her disordered hair, and half rose as if she must at once go to her room. Then a bitter shadow came over her face, and she sank back again.

William, watching these eloquent changes in the beloved, familiar face, felt his own heart stirred by a varied sequence of emotions. He liked her surprise. If she had cared deeply for Daniel she could not have forgotten him for three whole days. On the other hand, her pleasure in remembering him was unmistakable. Well, doubtless, William should like that, too, her pleasure being all in all to him; resolutely and sturdily he decided to like it. Then her bitterness arrested him, and turned all his feeling into one

deep channel of concern. With the sure intuition of love he divined her trouble.

"Barbara, your father sees things differently now," he said, with a voice of authority. "He has lost his limitations; he understands. You mustn't shame him by holding him to his old mistakes."

Again Barbara's wide gaze greeted a new idea, slowly and wonderingly this time, dwelling upon the suggestion with a hesitating relief which dared not let itself go. Yet, incomplete as it was, her assuagement had depth below depth in it. William had helped her more basically than she as yet understood. It was with a pardonable feeling of triumph that he went away and left her to the other man's services, which without his own prior ministration she would not have known how to receive.

Daniel hesitated a moment as he stood in the doorway. Two memories haunted him and made him pause to learn his bearings. One was the remembrance of his last conversation with Barbara, on the winter hillside; the other was of her denial of him on the immediate brink of the chasm which had just cleft her life. On which side of this chasm would he find her now, and how should he meet her most easily?

Perhaps she read his doubtful plight, her own heart teaching her. At any rate, she rescued him, and, by her quiet manner, made it clear that she was going to ignore the past, and that her present need waited wholly on him. His embarrassment dissolved before her friendly eyes.

Before the blazing fire, with the big pink sea-shells

beside them and with photographs heaping the table where Reuben's papers had recently lain, they spent the rest of the afternoon. That is to say, they were apparently there, in the shadowy, flame-shot room, in the brooding old house, on the lonely mountain side; but, in reality, they were straying through Rome. He knew exactly where to take her, where to bid her pause and sit down, giving herself over to the spell of the grand old city. It had often seemed to him that Rome might serve as the most reassuring comforter a troubled heart could ask; and now he found that he had been right in this surmise. Watching Barbara closely, he saw the lines of her forehead and mouth relax as she dwelt on a picture of the Appian Way, and heard how long those old stones had been a thoroughfare for the flitting generations of men.

"Nothing lasts very long," he said gently. "Nothing matters much."

"How peaceful!" Barbara murmured, with her quieting eyes drinking in the beauty of the ruin-starred Campagna. "It comforts me. I wonder why." She raised her eyes, and returned for a moment to her actual environment. "If it's just the age of it, our mountains are a great deal older. The aqueducts are shadows compared with the rock in our dooryard."

"Oh, yes, but"—he met her eagerly—"the aqueducts are human, and the rock is not. It takes people to help other people. We can't measure ourselves by the seasons or ages. We can't say, 'Because Green Peak has endured storms, I can endure them.' But we can say, 'Because other people have suffered,'"—he

touched one of the tombs with his pencil—"I can suffer. Because other people have done things,"—he indicated an aqueduct—"I can do things too." The mountains are cold and impersonal." He glanced out of the window, and shivered. They were indeed very cold to-day, standing dark and monotonous under a gray sky. They looked like sulky giants. "But people, even the works of dead people, are warm and stimulating. One learns more from the Colosseum than from any mountain range: more of purpose and pity and regret, shame and forgiveness, and other human things."

"Peace is a human thing, too," he went on musingly. "Mountains can't be peaceful, for they have never known what it means to struggle, they have never tried to resist. The Appian Way quiets you now because it has resisted a great many times, and has always been conquered, and has had to give in. Now it gives in of its own accord, and finds that therein lies the whole secret of life."

"In giving in?" Barbara questioned, still with her eyes on the photograph.

"To one's destiny," he replied antiphonally.

"But what is one's destiny?"

She seemed afraid to look up, lest she break the old-world spell; but her eyelids quivered.

He hesitated and sighed. It was plain that he started to say something, then changed his mind.

"That is a question which every person has to answer for himself," he enunciated at length, in the voice of a conscientious preacher.

"Well, it is quite true that it takes a person to help a person," she said, pulling herself away from her contemplation of the photographs, and looking up at him gratefully and frankly. "You have helped me more than you know to-day, and I can't thank you enough."

"I wanted to help you."

He held her gaze rather wistfully. Was she going to let him continue to help her? Yes—bless her!—indicating the pictures, she asked,

"May I keep these to look at to-night? And will you bring me some more to-morrow?"

Late in the evening, when she sat alone in the kitchen, Priscilla having taken an apologetic departure to bed, she shut her eyes and tried to win her difficult way to conscious touch with the spirits of her father and mother. It was difficult; she was baffled. Silence and unconcern met her groping thoughts. Once she spoke half aloud, as if she would force Heaven to hear her:

"I'll do my best. I promise you that. My very best. But I'm not sure yet what that is. Oh, father, you must forgive and help me."

XVII

THE winter closed down very suddenly now, and shut the homestead in on itself more completely than usual. Not in years had the snow been so deep, and seldom had the winds howled so furiously.

Like most country women, Barbara was accustomed to house-bound ways in bad weather. Winter was always, at best, an irksome season with her; and this year she found it almost intolerable.

She missed her father even more than she had missed her mother; for there was no one to take his place, as he had taken hers. Moreover, she realized, for the first time fully now, what a predominant part he had always played in her life. Through his more or less unconscious demand and through her willing acquiescence, he had swayed and governed her, so that she had held her own inner life in abeyance, waiting on his will. Could she always have stood thus attendant on him? Probably, yes; for she loved him. But her attitude must ever have been more passive than active, more negative than positive. The inner life can be held indefinitely in abeyance, but it cannot be forced into action by any volition other than its own.

Now she felt like a child who has been holding the ends of the reins behind its father's hands, and who

suddenly finds itself driving alone, with nothing between it and the strong horse. She showed her native temper by advancing and tightening her grasp. She would see that the horse did not run away. But what turn she should suggest to it next she had not the least idea.

"Never mind about that," said the horse knowingly. "I'm a well-trained animal. I know the way. Just hold the reins, and avoid the rocks and the mud puddles. I'll do the rest."

This was only too true. A well-ordered life, consistently and strongly impelled, has a momentum which carries far beyond the range of its motive power. It was more than Barbara could do at first—tired and sad and bewildered—to challenge the familiar, continued tendency of her affairs. She could only sit tight and hold on. The result was that, before she knew it, she had taken several decisive turns. She had added eighty-five acres to her farm, and had ordered the erection of a barn on the new land.

William had tried to dissuade her from this. He had argued the matter, first with Reuben and then with her. But for almost the first time in his experience with her, he had found himself impotent.

"Barbara, wait a while," he had urged. "The land won't run away. Your chance will be just as good next spring. And then you'll know better what you want to do—you, you yourself."

He stressed and repeated the pronoun, trying to make her gather up the reins. But she only looked at him passively.

"It seems to be the thing to do," she answered.

Reuben was scarcely triumphant. He had looked on the purchase as so inevitable that he had not entertained the notion that it might fail to go through. When Barbara signed the papers he gave a little matter-of-fact nod; then opened the subject of the building of the barn.

It was hard for William to feel impotent where Barbara was concerned. The situation more nearly disturbed his fundamental patience than any other he had ever known. It was not—so he told himself, trying to reason clearly and honestly—it was not that he wanted to sway her, as her father had swayed her, as Reuben was now taking his turn at swaying her. He wanted to set her free. It was not his fault that the effort involved a degree of coercion which her father and brother had never had to employ, and that, therefore, his arguments with her had sounded more tyrannical than Reuben's. Strange that people should be so hard to set free! When freedom is the breath of life, the only chance for growth. But the perverse difficulty connotes all sorts of lovable things in the way of loyalty and devotion, and must not be handled recklessly.

He had, finally, no choice but to let her alone. After all, how did he know? She stood at the crossing of equally well-marked highroads. If she chose the home thoroughfare, all the better for him! Unless, indeed, she married John Andrews. He was not sure that he could bear to have her living, married to another man, under his very eyes. But, bear? What

kind of word was that? He could bear anything. So long as she really chose, so long as she deliberately set her feet in the direction that offered her life and happiness. She must not drift around her corner. But was she not already drifting?

"Well, I'll watch her," he said to himself. "I can probably see how the balance tips. And then, if she still won't choose, I'll choose for her."

Meantime, Daniel Pritchard came to the homestead constantly. He had sent for a pair of snow-shoes; and, in leggins, moccasins and fur jacket, with his papers under his arm, he looked like some slim, radiant Mercury of the winter world. His dark eyes glowed, and his bright hair escaped under the rim of his close little cap. He sped as if he had wings on his feet. No wonder people ran to the windows of the various houses he passed.

But he had eyes for no friendly face, watching and wishing, all ready to smile and invite him in. His entire concern was for Barbara. He felt as if he had found his mission, the end for which he had plucked himself from his blissful dreams in Italy and had returned to the country of his barren boyhood. She was his greater dream, his listener. There was no doubt about her need, nor about his capacity to meet it. The leap of life into her sober face, when she heard his step at the door, was sufficient proof of the effect he had upon her.

He was very happy. He had already surmised that it must be much better to share a delight than to possess it in the first place, that, in fact, one does not

fully possess until one shares; but he had not known that sharing would bring such revelations. As he bent with Barbara over pictures of places long familiar to him, and told her what they stood for, what sort of impression they made, he often seemed to see them for the first time.

"Look!" he would say. "I never noticed that beautiful curve. How it takes the sky! And don't you think that a very solemn arch? I can't remember that I ever saw it before."

Sometimes he sat, silently pondering a photograph; and then burst forth with a very different interpretation from that which he had intended to give. Barbara inspired him to new insight.

She looked and listened intently. In this friendly companionship and in the touch of the great outer world on her cabined soul she found the only relief and escape from the brooding trouble of her orphaned winter. For several hours each day she not only ignored her hovering problems, but quite forgot them, swept her horizon clear of them. In Italy, Greece, and Egypt she found a much simpler self than in Vermont.

Also, as has been hinted, she found an easy and sympathetic companion—the only companion by whom she now felt entirely undisturbed. Priscilla fretted her, Reuben troubled her deeply, and William made her aware of a constant scrutiny. It would seem that Daniel might have bothered her more than any of these, since he had once asked a profoundly disquieting thing of her. But he made no reference, by word

or look, to that afternoon on the hillside before her father's death; and she liked him better for his forbearance than if there had been no forbore thing in the background of their mutual consciousness. She was perfectly human and feminine. It may have been that his ignoring piqued her curiosity. Had he forgotten? No; one cannot forget episodes like that, even if they prove to be only episodes. Had he changed his mind, then? Or was he sparing her out of consideration for her preoccupying sorrow? She did not put these questions to herself at all analytically, for sustained interest in them would have offended her delicacy; but they were there in the background, and doubtless they beckoned her attention more often than she knew.

The result of the interplay of all these forces was a quite beautiful friendship. Exquisite elements of adjustment swayed and balanced it. The two young spirits were attuned to the same interests, the same dislikes, the same purposes; similar impulses prompted them, kindred reserves held them back. Perhaps that is why they remained so cold. The balance may have been too perfect.

It was not only about Europe that Daniel talked with Barbara. He had much to say on the complementary subject of his life purpose.

"You see," he said eagerly, "I must try to give as much as I get. And what can I better give than the very thing I get? I'd like to spend half of every year in Europe, gathering pleasure, and the other half in Vermont, sharing it."

"Well, you can, can't you?" asked Barbara.

"I hope so," he nodded.

"If only"—his face fell, and he smiled a little ruefully—"if only I can make people want to hear me. They aren't all like you."

He regarded her with a curious mixture of gratitude and regret which made her laugh.

"You must practise on us this winter," she said. "Give some more talks in the town hall. Perhaps I can help you. The trouble is that you forget how little we know, how little you knew, yourself, ten years ago. You must talk down to our level—and you must let yourself go."

"Yes," he assented, "I know that. Will you sit in the front row where I can watch your eyes?"

He did give a series of public talks, and they were more successful than any he had ever held. Barbara criticized them severely beforehand, and made him practise them on Priscilla.

"It will help you more to watch her eyes than mine," she admonished him gaily. "If you can keep them open with this description of the vaults of Saint Peter's, I shall miss my guess."

So then he revised and enlivened his paragraphs until he was rewarded by a steady gaze from the eyes of Priscilla.

William served as practise audience, too. Seeing how much Daniel's visits meant to Barbara, and noting their frequency, he had made an early winter attempt to efface himself, and had tried not to come to the homestead so often as usual. Perhaps this ef-

fort was not altogether magnanimous and humble. He may have wanted to spare himself all superfluous pangs of jealousy. But the experiment was not successful. After three consecutive days of avoiding the well-worn path to the Marshall farm he had been surprised by a visit from Barbara. She had sought him out in his corn-house, and had looked at him with eyes of concern.

"William, is anything the matter? Have you been sick? Or your mother?"

"Why, no, Barbara."

For the first time, his eyes avoided hers.

"But, but—" she stammered, not embarrassed but taken aback and at a loss. "But I haven't seen you for three days," she stated conclusively.

He did not try to excuse himself. There had never been anything but plain dealing between Barbara and himself.

"Do you want me to come?" he inquired, with his eyes full on her at last.

"Why—why, William," she stammered again. "I don't know what you mean," she ended helplessly.

Just for a moment the Fates that watch our precarious human destinies, trying out the experiments in their huge cauldron, must have held their breath. Barbara stood in peril of immediate eclipse in a resolute masculine embrace that would have upset all her maiden equilibrium, all her conception of her life, and all the rest of our story. But the ominous moment passed, with but a deep breath to mark its significance;

and, turning back to his work to conceal the sudden pallor he felt in his face, William said:

"I'll come to-night."

After that, he indulged in no fine-drawn considerations, no pain-saving devices. She wanted him, needed him to satisfy some obscure demand of her spirit; and she should have him. Was he not utterly hers?

He grew very expert in watching himself, and very nimble in clutching his jealousy before it could slip out through some crack in the fortress of self-control where he had willed to confine it. He scorned his weakness, and cast it into dungeon after dungeon. Why could he not, once for all, stifle and crush the thing?

With steady eyes he also watched the growth of the friendship between the boy and girl. This puzzled him somewhat. Lover himself, he was critically sensitive to the manifestations of love in other people; and the light in Daniel's eyes did not satisfy him. It kindled as readily at a Madonna's pictured face as at Barbara's living glance. There was something high and impersonal in it, like the light of the evening star. She, for her part, was as simple and serene as the new moon, her spirit's outline undisturbed by pulsing emotion. The relation was not what William called love. But he admitted that it was beautiful. He felt as if he were watching the unfolding of some rare and exquisite flower, pure white, with no fragrance. Star, moon, flower—these white things symbolized the friendship. William would have wanted the sun, the clasp of the mountains, the rush of the streams, in

his heart union with his beloved; and therefore it was not altogether a manly courage that enabled him to witness the meeting of Daniel's and Barbara's eyes. Sour grapes are now and then genuinely sour.

Daniel and Barbara, William and Priscilla, made an incongruous but congenial quartette on many a winter evening in the kitchen of the homestead; and warm and cosy was the look of the little group they formed. It would seem that Barbara's face might have lost its somberness. What was the matter with her, that her eyes still brooded and were troubled?

The old house could have answered that question if it had chosen to break its ancient reserve. Immitigably, it saw to it that no group was ever complete under its roof without the addition of its own hovering presence; and it spoiled the harmony of quartette, trio, or duet, by playing an unscored part. It had never been so alive and alert as it was this winter; its echoing rooms were full of rumor and question and challenge. Barbara was half afraid of it. As never before, she realized what a dominating influence it wielded. Sometimes she fought it. She opened the windows and pulled the shades high, inviting the outdoors. But one cannot turn a presence out of itself; and the cold winter air only drove the homestead's spirit deeper and further in. A frozen trouble is worse than a glowing one.

Barbara felt herself helpless and dumb. She had no words large enough to reply to the racial utterance which was ever in her ears. But she understood it well enough; she knew what it wanted of her. Her

father's voice had gone to swell it now; and his dying words epitomized, while they softened, the universal demand. "Be a good girl, Barbara." Was it really good in her to spend her winter evenings over pictures of Italy instead of books on agriculture?

Sometimes she stood in the window, with her back to the rumoring house, and looked out over the impassive sweep of the winter landscape. It was very beautiful—etched and chiseled silver against a sapphire sky—but it was lonely and unresponsive. She appealed against it in vain. Beyond it lay warm and vital cities, full of people whom one might love and help, people in whom was the breath of life, the dream, the hope, the purpose. She wanted keenly to go to them. There lay the chance and the promise. She put out her hand and took up a sea-shell, hoping that its voice might drown the murmur of the house. But the latter was always too much for her, swelling and growing behind her; and, in order to escape it, she turned back into it, lighting the lamp and stirring the fire.

Morbid? Yes, of course she was that. But she could not help it. She was in the throes of a civil war of her own life and nature. And her mother's eyes were closed to her in the sleeping garden.

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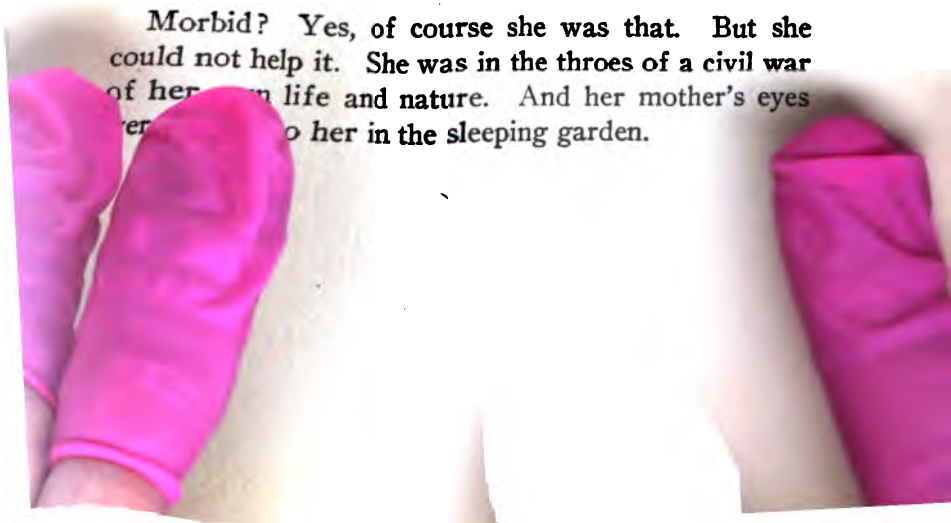
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XVIII

BARBARA was not the only woman in the snow-bound valley who suffered that winter. Probably, if she could have compared notes with all her country sisters, she would have found few who did not share her restlessness. But the degree of their sympathy would have depended upon the isolation of their homes and the size of their families. Married women, with many children, might have complained most loudly, if they had been consulted. The children were always under your feet; they made such a noise you couldn't hear yourself think; the house looked like a cyclone; the men folks were dreadfully in the way, sitting around and smoking. But these busy women really had the best of the situation; it was good for them not to be able to think too much. Moreover, their plentiful, ubiquitous audience gave them a chance to express their disapproval from time to time, and so rid their minds of it. Solitary, inarticulate women, like Martha Sloan, felt the slow confinement of the weeks most cruelly.

William was troubled about his mother. She did not seem well. She was pale and thin, and ate little, subsisting mostly on strong tea. She worked incessantly. Sometimes he suspected her of sweeping the entire house in a single day. He remonstrated with her, but had to be careful how he did so.

"Mother, the house is as neat as a pin. Why do you wear out the carpets and yourself?"

"I guess I know more than you do about what's neat and what isn't. As for wearin' out, that's nearly done a'ready."

"I wish you'd have a hired girl. I know one I could get to-morrow. She'd save you all the heavy work, and be company for you."

"Hired girl! When I come to the pass where I can't take care of my own house and where I'm dependent on strangers for company, I'll——"

Martha broke off and turned away, whether because she was at a loss for a conclusion, or because she had a cake in the oven, or simply because she was impatient of further discussion, William could not say. The last clause of her unfinished speech stabbed him, as it was intended to do. He looked after her ruefully. If only she would make it possible for him to be a better son!

The situation seemed to him hopeless. He had tried, and been baffled, and tried again. His most carefully planned advances had met with the worst repulses. After all, there is such a word as "impossible" in every dictionary; and, open and endless as, for the most part, the roads of life are, there is hardly a human experience that does not, somewhere or other, run into a blind alley.

Of course he was not aware of his own masculine clumsiness; he did not know that the very conscientiousness of his filial attempts irritated his mother. How could he be conscious of mistakes which he com-

mitted with his whole honest heart? But he knew, on general principles, that women are supposed to understand one another better than men understand them; and he certainly felt himself woefully in the dark. Therefore, after some hesitation, he took counsel with Barbara.

"I wish I could get her to come over and see you," he said. "She never goes out; she gets no fresh air and no diversion. She's lonely—that's what's the matter with her. I'm afraid she'll be sick."

Barbara hesitated. She knew what her friend was not asking of her.

"She doesn't like me, William," she said deprecatingly. "I might do her more harm than good."

"That's because she doesn't know you," William protested. "You're older now, and you've had more experience, and you know what loneliness is."

That was true. At least, they both thought it was true. Barbara glanced at her father's pipe, and out at her mother's snow-heaped garden, with a pang of self-pity. But the older woman, across the fields, alone in her cheerless kitchen, might have laughed bitterly if she had heard them. Lonely! That blooming girl, with life all before her, with two lovers at her side every day, with a bright, cosy environment, responsive to her home-making touch! Lonely! She could have told them something, if her experience had not transcended words.

Barbara's heart responded at last. She was too generous not to feel the rebound of her pang in compassion for her neighbor.

"I'll go to see her this afternoon, William," she promised.

The day could not have been better chosen for a mission of comradeship. Loneliness was in its every aspect—in the low gray sky, in the gloomy hills, in the few wandering flakes of snow, in the chill, damp air, not cold enough to be bracing, but very penetrating. All the world seemed shut in on itself, brooding hopelessly. Barbara shivered and walked fast. She could make what haste she would, for William always kept a well-trodden path between his house and hers, and, knowing that she was coming to-day, he had made a special trip with his snow shovel.

He had not told his mother of the visit in store for her. He had been afraid that, thinking about it beforehand, she might perversely decide that it was unwelcome, and so find means to avoid it. Neither did he let himself claim any share of the friendly errand. He hung about the barnyard, watching for Barbara's approach; but, when he saw her coming, he withdrew into the stable, and left the field clear.

That was a mistake on his part, for the girl was ill at ease in her mind, and would have been glad of a reassuring hand at the gate. She and Martha Sloan had never had much to do with each other. Why should they? They belonged to different generations, and were fundamentally unlike. Even Barbara's mother had failed to make any headway with her unsociable neighbor; and it was natural that the daughter should shrink from the unpromising attempt.

She paused in the barnyard, and looked about,

searching, listening for William. Then, when she caught no sign of him, her heart settled coldly a little lower; and she went on across the bleak winter lawn to the uninviting house.

The kitchen door stood a little ajar, as if some one had just gone in or come out; and Barbara, pausing again on the step, heard a sound of talking. That cheered her; she lifted her head, and her face brightened. William was waiting inside for her; she was comforted. But when she did not hear his deep voice, replying to his mother, she was again disquieted and stood hesitating. What a long speech for Martha to make! She was reputed a silent woman. Barbara distrusted her ears. To whom was she speaking? For several minutes there was not enough of a pause in the monotonous sequence of words to give any chance for reply. But by and by the broken flow ceased; and then a disconcerting silence set in. What could be the matter? Barbara tried to peer around the edge of the door and see the occupants of the kitchen. A serious subject must be under discussion between them, that one of them should have found so much to say and the other should have to wait so long before formulating an answer. She was unaccountably loath to enter; she stood irresolute, waiting for the second voice in the colloquy. Then, to her dismay, the first voice began again, talking faster, as if it had taken fresh hold on its theme; and she realized that William's mother was talking to herself.

After all, there was nothing so strange in this, no real cause for dismay. Many country people talk to

themselves. Priscilla did, now and then. But the cumulative effect of the desolate day, the forbidding house, Barbara's own mood, and the long, aimless soliloquy was disheartening. If the girl had been a shade less in earnest, she would have turned away. As it was, her lifted hand faltered a little. Then she suddenly nerved it, and set it to rapping more lustily than was necessary. She did not want to hear any more of that one-sided conversation.

It took Martha so long to come to the door that Barbara's heart had a chance to begin to fail her again. What if, after all, there was some one else there? Some one who, remaining unheard, wanted also to remain unseen; some one who—some one—— Barnaby Rogers's imagination was a questionable inheritance.

"I don't want anything."

Thus, instinctively, Martha parried, when she saw a skirt through the crack of the door and knew that a caller (doubtless an agent) was requesting admission. But when she came closer and saw who it was, she stood astonished. The two women silently stared at each other. Their greeting was not propitious.

"William ain't here. Don't know where he is."

It was probably in all good faith that Martha offered this information. She could not suppose that Barbara had come to see her, and her mind leaped to a natural conclusion. But her voice was hard and ungracious. Barbara flushed at it.

"I know he isn't," she replied, with some dignity. ("Don't you suppose I know all about William?" her manner implied. "And should I be likely to have oc-

casion to seek him at your hands?" "I came to see you," she enunciated explicitly.

No, truly, it was not a propitious introduction to a friendly call. It was more like a challenge. Martha still held the door on the crack, suspicious and defiant. But, fortunately, there was something in the bleak look of the threshold and in the gaunt face peering out that reminded Barbara why she had come and re-aroused her compassion. Her young face softened.

"May I come in? Or are you too busy?" she asked disarmingly.

"Of course I'm busy." Martha widened the crack rather grudgingly. "I'm always busy. But come in."

She indicated a chair.

Barbara sat down. So far, so good! She had not been asked to take off her coat, but that omission was rather convenient than otherwise in the cheerless room. The fire was low in the range, and the gray light came coldly through the uncurtained windows. She shivered inside her warm wraps. Martha paid no attention to her, but produced a pan of potatoes, and, standing by the sink, began to pare them. Silence started in again.

"Won't you let me help you?" Barbara asked, after a moment, making a doubtful motion as if to pull off her mittens.

"No, thank you."

Martha cut her short.

"You wouldn't pare them close enough," she condescended to explain.

"It's a horrid day, isn't it?"

After another pause Barbara ventured the remark, not because it was particularly illuminating, but because she must say something; the silence troubled her. The commonplace statement was not so bad, either. It might have opened the way for a sympathetic comparison of degrees of loneliness and deprivation, and thus two women's hearts might have been eased. But Martha scorned the chance.

"I'm too busy to notice the weather," she said concisely.

Yet again silence. Barbara would not have minded it so much if it had been an ordinary silence. She was not a great talker, and was used to friendly pauses. But the voice which she had heard, as she stood outside the kitchen door, haunted her memory; and she involuntarily looked on the present hush as a probable introduction to another soliloquy. She hazarded another attempt at an opening wedge.

"William tells me you haven't been well."

As before, the remark seemed innocuous; and certainly Barbara meant it kindly. But constraint and embarrassment had made her voice a little hard, and Martha's perversity found a chance to quarrel with it.

"Lots he knows about it!" she said, without looking around from her work. "He never sees me except at meal times, an' not always then. He sees you, though, don't he? He's got plenty of time to talk things over with you, an' tell you how his mother's fallin' off, how pretty soon she'll be out of the way. Oh, yes, he can notice that I'm lookin' peaked; but he

can't do nothin' about it, not he! Tells you I ain't ben well! Not well!"

This sudden, inconsecutive speech was delivered with the speaker's back to her audience, and so had the effect of being precisely what Barbara had dreaded—another soliloquy. The tone was the same as that which had disquieted the girl before her entrance. Broken, monotonous, it went on as if it might never stop.

"No! Please!"

Barbara's interruption sprang out of its own accord. It really meant, "Please stop talking like that." But she did not consciously give it this significance. Martha turned and looked at her.

"What's the matter with you?" she inquired. "Cryin' out like a baby! I suppose you're afraid I'm goin' to go blamin' William. I can if I want to. I guess I'm his mother. I can do what I please. It's nothin' to you, is it? Tell me, is it? Tell me, what is it to you?"

Barbara was too disturbed to read the yearning interest in this cry, and give it its due. She only felt the antagonism.

"William's my friend," she said, because she had to say something.

"Friend!"

It would have taken an experienced, versatile heart to read at a glance all the meaning which Martha packed into this word. Scorn, incredulity, wistfulness, wonder, perplexity, indignation, dismay: these various elements combined to make a surcharged ex-

pletive. What a thing was this friendship, this bond of the spirit against which the physical, maternal bond must pull in vain! For a minute, her hard blue eyes were as complex as her voice. Then she went on:

"You call it friendship to coax a man away from his home and his work, to make him give all his time to you? You ought to know that farm work can't be done in fits and starts. He was as steady a boy as his father's son ought to be; but you, with your whims an' your runnin's away—oh! many's the plantin' day you've spoiled for him an' the harvestin' you've interrupted. I certainly should think you'd be ashamed; I'm ashamed for you. An' now it's your books an' your pictures. Why can't you set up an' go to work? You've got a big farm on your hands. You're a no-count hussy, that's the truth. I'm ashamed of my son that he can't leave you alone."

There was no soliloquy about this speech. It was delivered so directly at Barbara that it had the effect of a well-aimed volley. Every word hit the mark. The girl received it dumbly. She was not used to hatred; and she had not the least idea what to say in reply. She should have said something, however. A soft answer may turn away wrath, but silence drives it back on itself and increases it.

"Ah-h-h!"

Perhaps the present pause gave Martha her turn at strained attention and baffled expectation. Perhaps she felt that she could not stand it and must say something to tide it over. At any rate, she opened her mouth and made as if she would speak; but only a

harsh, broken murmur came from her lips. The effect was startling. Which pair of eyes inaugurated the dismay which both women's faces reflected, the one to the other?

Barbara rose. She was not angry; and, later, she wondered at herself that she had not been so. The obscure appeal in the hard face before her disarmed her resentment. But she was too young and too ignorant to know how to meet such a subtle plea; and doubtless her very recognition of it was unconscious. She thought only of ridding the room of her unwelcome presence.

"I guess I'd better be going home," she said, turning away.

William met her at the door, and came in before she got out. He had no longer been able to stand the uneasiness which had beset him in the barn, goading him to come and see with his own eyes how things were going. Quickly and anxiously he glanced from one woman to the other; and, for an instant, his face reflected the same half-frightened look which was in their eyes. Then he pulled himself up and spoke. He seemed to feel a resolute, masculine need of dealing summarily with the silence of the room.

"Going so soon, Barbara?"

His voice rang louder and more cheerfully than was characteristic or necessary. He shut the door rousing. Barbara hesitated before him. It was for his sake that she had come, and she hated to fail him or to come short of his expectation. She searched his face. To please him she would have turned back into

the unhappy room. But Martha gave her no chance.

"Yes, she's goin'," she said from the sink, where she had resumed her potatoes. "She can't stay no longer. Better go with her an' see that she gets home safe."

"Don't come, William," Barbara said, standing outside in the chill winter dusk. "Go back and stay with her. She isn't well. She oughtn't to be left alone. And yet—oh, William! perhaps there isn't anything you can do for her."

William felt his own hopelessness echoed in these sober words. He felt also a vague new foreboding. His face settled into grave lines.

"I'll have to do my best, Barbara. Thank you for coming," he said.

Barbara fairly ran back across the fields. The night was coming fast, and the mountains had settled into a huge gloom. Purple-black, with wan, glimmering streaks of snow, they shrugged their shoulders against the gray sky and gave themselves over to starless dreariness. There was something grand about them, looming thus; but there was also something so desolate that Barbara tried not to look at them. They oppressed her intolerably. The few flakes of snow were still wandering aimlessly through the air, as if they had neither the heart for a purpose nor the patience to stay at home. Barbara sympathized with them. She secretly congratulated one that fell against her cheek, and so found the sure repose of nothingness. Oh, the silence! It filled her brain and kept her anxiously waiting, as if it were the prelude to something.

To what? To the utterances that lay behind the silence in Martha Sloan's kitchen? Perhaps. Whatever they were, they were terrible, and she did not want to hear them.

She stumbled in at the homestead gate, trying not to look at the house which confronted her. But it was as stern as the mountains in commanding her attention. In spite of herself, she paused a moment and looked up at it. Priscilla had gone out this afternoon, and there had been no one to light the lamps against the invading dusk. Consequently, the dark bulk of the house loomed rayless and forbidding beneath its leafless, shivering trees. How silent it was, too! Had all the universe gone mad with silence? She dreaded to open the kitchen door, lest it should introduce her into the waiting hush which Martha's house had preserved, lest—worse still—the withheld utterance should suddenly burst upon her.

But when she had roused herself to the effort, and stood within her threshold, she gave a little sob of relief. The room was in shadow, but a warm fire was glowing in the stove, and before it sat Daniel, dreaming and waiting. When he heard her he sprang up and came forward, his hands outstretched to meet hers and then to help her take off her coat.

"I certainly thought you'd never come!" he said.

With quick movements she lighted the lamp, drew the curtains, stirred the fire, pulled forward the singing tea-kettle and a savory dish of stew.

"You must stay to supper," she cried. "And then, afterwards, you must tell me about the busiest, most

crowded street in the world, the noisiest, the brightest, the most solidly built. Put automobiles and hand-organs in it, and fire engines and ambulances, and shops and churches and hotels, and people, people, people. Make it shout and sing; make it deafen me."

"All right," he responded gaily, meeting her mood. "Fifth Avenue will do very well; though perhaps Sixth would be better because of its Elevated trains. Once, when I was crossing Forty-second Street——"

And he plunged at once into a description.

Meantime, in the other kitchen, across the fields, Martha Sloan was trying to outwit her silence by running away from it. She flew from one household task to another, sweeping a speckless hearth and dusting a shining table. The look of dismay did not fade from her eyes as it did from Barbara's.

William spent the evening at home. He made no attempt at conversation; his many failures in this line had discouraged him. But he sat by the lamp in the kitchen and read the daily paper. A paper does not erect quite such a barrier between the reader and his fellowmen as a book. Martha took no advantage, however, of his wide, deliberate turnings of sheets and his many pauses. She held her peace on her side of the lamp, and mended a much-darned table-cloth. Peace! What a misnomer! The silence was louder with restlessness than a thunder storm. It was a relief when nine o'clock brought the lighting of the bedroom candles.

"Good-night, mother."

"Good-night."

The reply was curt and ungracious.

Many times during the troubled night William stole to his mother's door. Once he heard her muttering to herself, often he heard her turning uneasily; and he knew that her demon of unrest had not let her go. He was very anxious and unhappy. Worse than that, he was impotent.

XIX

REUBEN has not been mentioned as forming one of the group in the kitchen of the homestead during the winter evenings; but the truth is that he was frequently there—a fifth member, or, according to the old house's calculations, an invaluable sixth. When he appeared there was no more question of ruins or cathedrals; they were calmly swept from the kitchen table and from the field of interest. The young farmer never apologized for his serene displacement of them by his agricultural projects. Does one apologize for interrupting a meal of crackers and jam with an offering of roast beef? He took it for granted that William and Barbara would give him their full, spontaneous attention. As for Daniel, he was extraneous and negligible. "Good-evening," and later, "Good-night," marked the usual, perfunctory extent of Reuben's notice of him.

Daniel did not resent his neglect. Sometimes he accepted it as a dismissal, and went away; sometimes he lingered on the edge of the little group, haled so suddenly from happy roamings through magic lands and set down so solidly to a discussion of phosphates and manure. He did not pretend to follow their conversation; it did not interest him. But it seemed to him only friendly to share Barbara's disappointment.

He watched her face, and wished he could spare her, wished he could spare them both.

William, however, did more than wish. He exerted himself so intelligently that he shielded and spared the girl more than any one dreamed. This was his chance. He knew little about palaces and fountains; but he knew a good deal about farming; and if he could not further the one subject, at least he could deflect and monopolize the other. He was very clever in his methods. He never spoke for Barbara; he shaped his observations as if he were meeting her on her own ground, replying to something she had said or was about to say. Even she herself did not realize how often he took out of her mouth words which should have been there, but for which she would have had a pretty search if he had not supplied them. As a matter of fact, he was cleverer about this than he need have been. Reuben was not observant. So long as the talk proceeded briskly and Barbara sat by the table, apparently watching his diagrams and noting his calculations, he was satisfied. But William liked to serve Barbara more completely than was necessary.

While the long winter held, Reuben's occasional interruptions were, therefore, to no one, more than a temporary inconvenience, and to William they were welcome as an opportunity. The menace in them was too remote to be reckoned with. But as the days lengthened, and the warm gusts began to wander up from the south, a new note of finality crept into the brotherly admonitions. One chapter was ending—the

introduction; and the page was about to be turned to the real business of life.

"Now, Barbara," he said one evening, early in March, when the snow had been dripping all day from the eaves, "I think you know pretty well how things stand, and what ought to be done first. I can't think of anything more that needs talking over."

He sat back in his chair and looked at the orderly books and papers strewn the kitchen table (even the strewings of Reuben were orderly). His voice and manner confessed a certain self-commendation. He thought he had done pretty well by his sister; and indeed he had. Many a man would have grugged and withheld all this advice to the inheritor of his own patrimonial acres. If his father had not loved Barbara best, the Marshall farm might have been the brother's. Yes, Reuben was generous.

Barbara understood this. She roused herself from the revery in which she had been plunged, and spoke sincerely:

"Thank you, Reuben, very much. You have been kind."

"But I can't help you any more now," her brother continued. "We're going to have an early spring; and in a week or two we'll both have our hands full with sugar making. Then, after that, there'll be no let-up until December. My farm's almost as big as yours. I'm going to engage my sap hands to-morrow, and I advise you to do the same."

Reuben had no dramatic instinct, and he was incapable of planning a skilful climax. Moreover, from

his point of view, his last suggestion was only the obvious next step in a long, orderly process. Toward what other end had he worked through the winter with Barbara? But no master of strategy could have achieved a neater surprise, could have more cleverly landed a bomb at the feet of his listener. To-morrow! Her sap hands! To-morrow! Barbara's eyes grew wide, and she caught her breath. So! the challenge had come to her; she was in for it.

William and Daniel both looked at her, as abruptly arrested as she was. They understood what had happened; and they, too, held their breath. Only Reuben, the precipitator, remained unaware of the tenseness of the moment.

Then, slowly, Barbara put out her hand. Was she going to gather the papers, or push them away? Still more slowly, she rose from her chair, and swept them into her clasp.

"All right, Reuben," she said steadily. "I'll begin to-morrow."

Was it only the rising spring wind that sent such a long, restful sigh through the house? A coal dropped in the kitchen range, and the fire flashed forth a bright ray.

As usual, Barbara kept her word. In fact, she anticipated it; for she "began" that evening. When Daniel stood up to say good-night, she collected a pile of photographs and held them out to him.

"Oh! but," he demurred, backing away, with his hands behind him, "we haven't nearly finished with them."

"Yes, we have," she insisted gently. "Please take them."

"No, please!" It was an antiphonal chorus of pleas. "You can't do farm work in the evening."

"Yes, I can, with my head. Unless I'm too tired. And, anyway, that isn't altogether the point. Don't you see? Don't you know? Of course you do. Take them away."

"And must I stop coming to see you?"

"Yes. No." She looked at him with a dubious smile. "You can always find me at home in the barnyard or in the sugar bush."

There was no deflecting or persuading her. Her mouth and her eyebrows had settled into two straight lines, and she was resolute. Daniel went away in dejection; but William crossed the fields, trying not to pay too much attention to the clamorous hope which had suddenly sprung to life again in his heart.

By the end of the next month the watchful, critical country neighbors had to confess that they had never seen the Marshall sugar-making more successfully carried through.

"Guess Henry knew what he was about. He understood that Barb'ra had good stuff in her, underneath her moonin' ways. But who else would 'a' thought it? They say she was out in the sugar bush all day long, and sat up two or three nights, superintendin' the boilin'. Knew just when things went wrong, and wa'n't afraid to say so. Yet didn't seem to vex nobody. She certainly done real well."

This praise was merited; though, when it was re-

peated to its object, it did not give all the satisfaction that might have been expected. Barbara was surprised—and disconcerted—by her own success. She did not know how she had achieved it, nor quite how the whole circumstance had come about. Looking back on it at the end of the month—so far as the onward push of the succeeding month would let her pause to look back—she only knew that something had risen up in her on that evening of Reuben's last visit, and had taken command of her. She had not expected it, she had not known that she had it in her, and she had by no means altogether relished it. But she had obeyed it, and under its sway she had worked wonders.

Her men, her sap hands, had begun by smiling and shrugging among themselves at the idea of working under a woman, especially such a young, inexperienced girl. But their condescension had speedily been turned into respect. She knew how to let them alone, while yet keeping her eye on them. She deferred to them as freely as she now and then criticized them. Her knowledge surprised them. "Did Henry teach her, or was it just nat'ully born in her? Guess she's a Marshall, all right." Her unexpected prowess was a subject of discussion at many a supper table. Success and praise are pleasant things. Why did not Barbara's face respond to the universal congratulation? Why did her eyes remain so sober, as of one who stands dispassionately aloof, watching the trend of events?

The reason was, doubtless, that her spirit did stand

aloof, looking on at the deeds of her body, but not co-operating in them. There was a divorce in her nature, and that is always uncomfortable. Spirit cannot be divided. It is as essentially integral as the God from whom it springs. But the human nature, animated by it, is often complex and fluctuating. Neither can spirit be coerced. It is that which it is, which it always has been, which it must ever be. When the forces of human nature combine to set up a contrary tendency, there is often nothing for spirit to do but withdraw and wait. It is patient; it knows that eternity belongs to it. It is also rather proud.

Barbara missed her spirit. She was accustomed to its companionship and ministrations. For lack of it, even the spring woods, thrilling with hope and promise, failed to arouse the usual gladness in her.

"Well," suggested the spirit from beyond the pale, "if you turn a horde of noisy men loose in the woods, and give all your attention to helping them coin the first life of the spring into revenue for you, how can you expect the further reward of silence and mystery? The woods are not woods to you just at present; they are an office building."

She shrank from this half apprehended warning. She had loved the woods. Would she never be able to go there henceforth without remembering and calculating yields of maple sugar?

William watched her zealously. The farmer in him made admiring haste to applaud her dexterity. It was a pleasure to see work so firmly and skilfully done; he appreciated every stroke of her intelligence. The

man, the lover, was proud of her, too. That was the woman! He even liked to hear his fellow townsmen discussing her. "Barb'ry Marshall, she's got the stuff!" Yes, that was good to hear. But the friend, the brother in William, and so the deeper lover, was disturbed by the gravity in the girl's eyes. She was not happy. That spoiled everything.

He was with her a good deal. His own farm was not so big as hers, nor yet as Reuben's; and, anyway, it has already been seen that he never hesitated to sacrifice his work to his friend. If she needed him, or he thought that he could make her need him, his crops might go to destruction. But he was frequently surprised to find how superfluous was his advice. It was sometimes she who suggested new ideas to him.

"Barbara, where did you learn all these things?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

She sighed and passed her hand thoughtfully across her forehead. From her expression one might have supposed that she was puzzling over some outcropping of misfortune.

Poor Daniel came and went. He could not resist the coming; but neither, from another impulse, could he presently resist the disappointed going. Barbara—when he found her at home—was always polite to him, even friendly. But she would not let him talk about Rome, nor would she share a single one of his world-wide interests. He felt not only that he had lost her, but sometimes that he had never known her. This practical, level-browed, active person was not his old dream companion. He missed her sadly. Yet

it did not seem to occur to him that he might leave the valley.

When the sugaring season was over, the plowing followed fast along, then the harrowing and the early planting. Barbara managed everything. She sent for some agricultural books, to supplement her own knowledge and William's and Reuben's advice; she studied and weighed and experimented; she took endless pains. She found that Reuben had told the truth when he said that, once the farm season had started, there was no pause in its work. Up at dawn every morning, out all day long, in the fields, in the milk-house, in the stable, in the wood-lot, in the pastures, in the orchard, everywhere, she was heavily tired at night; and only kept herself awake long enough to consult her agricultural books and make some notes on the day's experiments. Then she tumbled into bed, and slept without dreaming. She no longer got up in the night to sit by her window and look out at the moonlit meadows.

One satisfaction, and only one, did she derive from her strange new obsession of work, and that was a greater friendliness on the part of her home. She was generally too busy or tired to think much about this; and when she did catch herself noticing it, she was apt to deride her own fancifulness. But the knowledge was there, in the background of her consciousness, and it comforted her.

On the very day after Reuben's fateful challenge, as she returned from engaging the first of her sap hands, she suddenly stopped at a turn in the road

which brought the homestead into view. She had often paused here before. There was something arresting about the look of the old house at this particular point. It dominated the hillside, waiting, reserved and commanding, under its great trees. It exacted a certain toll of respect from every passerby. Usually Barbara's heart had sunk at its grave admonition, and she had found it much more forbidding than attractive; but to-day she read a new meaning in the lines of its roof. Not oppressive, but protective, were they—kind, inviting, sheltering. The challenging look was gone from the windows, the eaves had ceased to frown, the delicate shadows, playing across the front door, beckoned her. In a sudden impulse, she ran through the gate and laid her cheek against one of the porch pillars. Later, she went into her mother's garden and found a snowdrop in bloom. That was a happy day.

The happiness had not continued, because of the divorce in her nature; but the sense of environing peace had held good. She was no longer haunted by voices and shadows. Because her mind was too healthily employed? Perhaps. But now and then, as the days lengthened and warmed, and it grew possible to sit on the steps in the dusk, underneath the budding trees, she was aware of a deep-breathing life, behind her, about her, holding her fast, yet paying less attention to her than formerly, because it trusted her more. Then she closed her ears more firmly than ever against the clamoring sea in her breast; and, knowing herself

trusted, she worked harder than ever to justify the confidence.

She gave her whole life to the farm; and, with eager, responsive hands, the farm accepted it. But her mouth was a hindered bow, and her eyebrows were caged wings.

XX

ONE afternoon, toward the close of a rainy day, she stood by the kitchen window. Uncomfortable as the weather was, she had been out of doors all day long, looking after some matters which seemed to her to brook no delay. She had been soaked through, and her sodden clothes had impeded her movements and dragged upon her; so that now she was very tired. Her strong, alert young figure had a listless droop to it. She stood up only that she might the better look out. She wanted to look out.

Why? She wondered about that, herself. There was certainly nothing very congenial in the dripping prospect. The earth seemed to have been snatched up bodily into the chilly embrace of a cloud, and to have lost its identity therein. The shapes of the mountains had vanished, even the near meadows appeared as mere nebulous glimpses, hints of plashy dreariness. There was nothing to be seen but blank gray mist. Why should any one want to look out?

Behind her, on the other hand, the old house was at its best. The fire glowed warmly in the kitchen stove, the kettle sang softly, preparing and yet reserving itself against the evening meal, the clock ticked gravely, the shadows crept with restful, tender, beneficent touches. All was well within.

Why did she not sink back into her home? It invited her; she could feel its coaxing caress almost tangibly upon her. Once or twice she glanced back over her shoulder; but then she gave an unaccountable shrug with that same member, and returned to her contemplation.

Oh, how dreary everything was! The northern New England spring, having started in fairly enough some two months ago, had lately been indulging in its traditional privilege of relapse and delay. It had sulked, it had shivered, it had turned on itself and broken faith with its buds by untimely frosts. With all her lifelong experience, Barbara had never learned to accept this perversity of the seasons as part of the natural order of things. It vexed her absurdly. She wanted to chide it, to reason with it. Now, this year, when she was engaged in active coöperation with it, it annoyed her exceedingly. How could she coöperate with anything that was so unreliable? Look at those meadows! They had awakened weeks ago, and they were not green yet. The crests of the mountains, behind the clouds, were as bare as in January. Earlier in the day a little damp snow had fallen with the May rain.

Her father had liked this uncertainty in the forces with which he dealt, or which dealt with him. She remembered that he had commended to her the excitement of "gambling with the weather." Why did she not like it, she wondered, as she stood with her forehead against the window frame, soberly gazing into the depressing mist? Was she not as brave, as

high-hearted as he? Perhaps not. And yet she thought that she had it in her to be. If only—! But here she caught herself up, aware that she was indulging in dangerous personal questions, trembling on the brink of the hidden sea which she had denied; and was about to turn back into the kitchen, when she saw Daniel Pritchard enter the gate.

In an instant, before she knew what she was doing, she had the door open and was standing on the threshold, her face full of welcome. She had not seen him in many days, and he was good to see. Her action was so instinctive that she did not notice how an inner door swung open too, and how her banished spirit stole across a mental threshold.

But Daniel noticed. He had not come to the homestead lately, because he had all but accepted the fact that Barbara was lost to him. She certainly had not wanted him, and the temper of her mind had been so different from what it used to be that he had lost the sense of kinship with her. He had come to-day chiefly that he might tell her of his intention of sailing for Italy in a few weeks.

But the minute he saw her his heart leaped; and he stood transfixed, gazing at her. His listener? Had he found her again? He could hardly believe his eyes. He forgot all about the errand which had brought him, and his face kindled dreams from hers.

"Come in," she said gently. "I'm glad to see you. Won't you take off your wet coat? I—" she glanced back into the shadowy room behind her, and shivered inexplicably. "Come, let's light the lamp and have

supper; then we can talk," she finished, with a swift gathering up of the reins of a new mood.

Daniel had not known Barbara long enough to grow accustomed to the speed of her mental processes; and he was bewildered by her present precipitancy. But he lost no further time in obeying her invitation and entering the room. As she lighted the lamp and stirred the fire, summoning the kitchen from its repose, he silently took off his coat and made himself at home. He caught himself wondering if the old house liked the sudden breaking up of its twilight mood. It seemed to him that he detected a lowering sort of hostility in the shadows which, refusing entire submission to Barbara's mandate, retreated to nooks and corners and bided their time. The place did not seem to him as benignant as it had seemed to Barbara ten minutes before. However—! He roused himself from his wonderment, put his perplexity aside, and concerned himself only with the realization that, miraculously, out of the monotonous, alien days, his friend had returned to him, that she was with him now, that this was his hour.

"No," he replied to her flying question—"Are you very hungry?"

"Well, I am," she parried, laughingly; "but not with my mouth."

Accordingly, it was a simple supper that, in a few minutes, lay on the table. But, even so, Priscilla had to eat most of it.

Then, when the few dishes had been washed and put away, and the room was in order, Barbara drew

her chair up beside the table with a happy gesture.

"Now!" she said in a tone of embarking. "I hope you brought some pictures with you."

"Alas!" He hated to fail her at the very outset; his voice was full of regret. "Only a few post cards. You see, the last time——" He hesitated.

"Yes." She accepted the unphrased apology, and put it aside, frowning a little. "Let me see them." She held out her hand.

"I could go to my room and back in half an hour," he suggested.

But that was a false touch. He might have known it. She admonished him—

"Oh, no!"

Nothing must be allowed to risk the breaking of the spell which bound them.

Then he had an inspiration. It was nothing less than that. He drew a pencil from his pocket, and, on a stray sheet of paper, began sketching Old World scenes from memory.

He had never done this before. He had not really known that he could do it. But, as a boy, he had had a knack with his pencil; and one winter in Paris he had spent a few desultory hours in a studio. The present result was crude enough. No artist would have cared to look twice at the highly experimental sketches he produced. But they were suggestive; and, above all qualifications, they were nicely adapted to his audience. Barbara found them stimulating. Her quick, sympathetic imagination leaped to supply their deficiencies and to interpret their meaning. She hung

over them, eagerly watching their development, from the first apparently random strokes to the final setting of street or city wall.

If they were stimulating to her, what was her creative presence to the wielder of the pencil? She had, before, quickened him to discover aspects in his photographs which had gone unnoticed; and now she sharpened his inner eye to remember and visualize.

"Oh, yes! Of course! I had quite forgotten," he said again and again, as he bent over his paper, erasing, re-shaping, hurrying to capture a glimpse of lurking beauty. He had never before so consciously, actively entered into the soul of his subject as in this attempt to recreate it for Barbara by his own effort.

As he drew, he talked. His words kept pace with his pencil, hesitating and stumbling when the latter was at a loss, groping now and then, but, in the end, always flowing freely. The result of the incomplete process was a peculiarly intimate vividness. Barbara felt that she stood in the very presence of the remote towers and churches. As soon as a sketch was finished, both fashioner and watcher drew back, lifting their flushed young faces; and, holding it off before them, gave themselves over to its contemplation. It was during this final scrutiny that Daniel's words found their freest vent. They came like a torrent, surrounding and lifting Barbara's spirit, bearing it on irresistibly to its forbidden sea. She listened—to vary the simile—like a thirsty soul that drinks.

She had not realized how thirsty she had been. Nor did she fully realize it now. Her past pain was swal-

lowed up in the fulness of her present recompense. In her joy over the object she lost all track of herself as the subject; she was entirely handed over to the glory of life. Life—that was it: dear, beautiful life; life that could interest, claim, absorb; the life of the spirit as contrasted with the life of the earth and the body. She was so happy that her cheeks glowed, her brows spread exultant wings, and her eyes shone like stars.

William stood a long time unnoticed, when he presented himself in the doorway behind the little group. Perhaps he was not instinctively gratified by his neglect, but his philosophy knew how to turn it to good account. With one hand on the half-open door and one foot on the step, he waited, not daring to move lest he break the spell that obtained within, and thus curtail his opportunity. It was long since he had had his object of objects, his Barbara, so completely at the mercy of his eyes. He had seen her mask every day for the last eight or nine weeks; but here at last was her living self again.

Was he glad to see her? His honest face acknowledged a conflict of feelings. He could hardly fail to rejoice at the glow that irradiated her features, the vital satisfaction that shone in her eyes. Any true lover must welcome joy in his beloved. But he would not have been human if he had felt no pang at the cause of the change in her. His glance swept the kitchen table, strewn with sketches; and, in spite of himself, his brows contracted. He stifled a sigh. Then he turned his attention to Daniel; and, for several

minutes, studied the young man's face with keen concentration. The challenge in his eyes might well have proved disconcerting to any one aware of it.

Daniel was at his best that evening. He was as thoroughly alive and awake as was Barbara. His eyes glowed darkly, and shade after shade of feeling chased across his expressive features. His bright hair tumbled confusedly about his forehead, and now and then he shook it back impatiently. He and his companion were like two flames, burning side by side, leaning to each other. Once he looked so long into her eyes, pondering some suggestion there, that William winced in the doorway. But then he seized a fresh piece of paper, and devoted himself to the silent elaboration of a sketch; and, at this consummation, the older man smiled, shook his head, and bit his lip. Not for sketches did he look into Barbara's eyes.

Toward whatever conclusions he was advancing when his observations were cut short, it was evident that he did not altogether like the trend of his mental processes. His kind eyes were puzzled and troubled; his forehead looked ill at ease.

It was Priscilla who saw him first. She had not found herself particularly interested in the evening's occupation, and had gone to sleep in a corner. Waking, she discovered the silent figure standing in the doorway.

"Why, William Sloan!"

But, at the first sound of his name, Barbara sprang from her chair and came running to him. She surprised him so by this movement that for a minute he

felt himself taken quite aback. She had seemed so wholly committed to the subject she had in hand that he would have thought she could hardly have focused her gaze on him without a pause for recollection and readjustment. And, indeed, he was not sure that she saw him now. Her expression was dazed, as if the rush of cities and seas to get out of the way of her headlong return blinded her vision. When she came impetuously up against him he held her off at arm's length and watched the collapse of domes and towers and city walls in her vivid face. He had never had such a strange impression. If he had not been country born and bred he might have been reminded of the toppling of Walhalla at the close of the *Götterdämmerung*. As it was, he stood thrilled and arrested. He had supposed that he knew all the moods which Barbara's spirit had ever donned; but he had never before seen her look like this. The strange experience ended in his taking his turn at becoming dazed and blinded as her vision cleared.

But her return to full consciousness of her surroundings produced another change of mood in her. The light died out of her face, as she slowly gathered herself together, removed her hands from William's, and looked about the walls of the shadowy kitchen.

"Oh, dear!" she said, half aloud; and the innocuous little expression was sharpened into significance by the troubled glance and the sigh that accompanied it. She turned back toward the kitchen table, and stood silently looking down at the papers that covered it.

Daniel had been in the midst of a sketch when Barbara had sprung up to welcome William, and he had not allowed his attention to be deflected by the arrival. The spell of the evening still held good with him. Conscious of his companion's return to his side, he pushed his paper toward her, and, with unlifted eyes, went on completing his drawing, while he began to talk.

"You see, the road runs here," he said.

But then he looked up sharply. Something in Barbara's motionless silence pricked his ignorance.

Alas! she was as suddenly, utterly gone as she had come to him. Her face had folded its wings, her eyes were as remote and unresponsive as two inaccessible wells. He dropped his pencil. He stared at her. Then he looked across at William. The reason of her return to him was shrouded in mystery, but the reason of her renewed departure was all too obvious. Even the gentle Daniel felt a prompting to indignation.

"I'm sorry I interrupted," said William, stumbling awkwardly in the meshes of his own emotion and of the subtle, only half-apprehended complexities of the situation. "I'll go away."

"No, please, William." Barbara's level voice arrested his retreat. "I'm glad you came in. I've been wanting to consult you about the spraying of my apple trees."

XXI

DURING the summer weeks which followed, William's fundamental patience was taxed to the utmost. He knew that there is nothing to be done with the processes of life—physical, mental, and spiritual—but let them work themselves out; that the more complex and important they are, the longer they take and the more dangerous it is to meddle with them; that their unity of purpose is not incompatible with a good many shiftings and delays. But it sometimes seemed to him that he could no longer stand the hesitations and contradictions of Barbara's destiny.

After the May evening of her relapse into vagabondage with Daniel she devoted herself to the farm more strenuously than ever. This was partly, of course, because the stress of the advancing season caught her and hurried her into task after task which she could hardly avoid. But there was more than necessity in her unremitting attention. Once or twice her watchful friend thought that he had reason to suspect her of doing things which she knew might just as well be left until another year. Then he thought of his mother, sweeping and re-sweeping the kitchen, and a pang clutched his heart. There was, alas! no longer much hesitation and doubt about Martha's destiny.

Daniel did not sail for Italy. On the contrary, he lost not a mail in returning his steamer ticket. It must be confessed that he looked at it for a long minute or two before he finally slipped it into its envelope; the hunger for the Roman Campagna had been especially strong with him of late. But the result was the same as if he had rushed to the Post Office before breakfast; and, having despatched his countermanding letter, he at once set out for the homestead—where he did not find Barbara. The rest of the early summer weeks he devoted to a rather fruitless haunting of the hillside.

The township had plenty to talk of that summer. Would Martha Sloan become dangerous? Oughtn't William to set some guard upon her? Would Barb'ry Marshall take up with the young lecturer who was always hangin' around her? And what would happen then? But the last question was never discussed very seriously, for no one thought that Barbara would really marry Daniel. She was too successful with her farm, too evidently engrossed in it; "she had too much sense."

Even Reuben remained undisturbed by Daniel's comings and goings. He had to admit to his wife that there was only one interpretation to put upon them; but so was there only one natural conclusion to draw from Barbara's indifference.

"She don't care for him. More'n half the time she ain't home when he calls; so his goin' so often don't count for as much as it seems to. And, when he does find her, she ain't very nice to him. For my part, I

wonder that he keeps on goin'. I guess he'll tire soon. Barbara ain't nearly so pretty as she used to be. And she's growin' obstinate, sot in her ways, a lot like her father. I couldn't do nothin' with her about those potatoes."

These last sorry statements were all too true. Barbara was not so pretty as she used to be, and her manner had hardened. Her joyless success had developed in her a determined self-sufficiency which was far from gracious. She did not like her work well enough to want to discuss it with other people, as her father—while still holding to his own way—had been pleased to do. So that, once having acquired self-confidence, she made her own plans and carried them out, and there was an end to them. William soon learned to let her alone; but Reuben had no intention of refraining from whatever advice or criticism seemed to him desirable. The consequence was that the brother and sister bickered a great deal. William mourned over all these things. Harder than his poor mother's aberration, harder than any other trial which life had exacted of him, was the knowledge of the warping of Barbara's fine spirit. She was meant to be loving and sweet and joyous; and circumstance was forcing her into an unhappy mold. He often wondered how long he would be able to stand it.

Daniel might well have been pardoned if he had put the same wonderment to himself—though with a different outcome to the end of his endurance. Barbara baffled him relentlessly; and he found himself continually affronted in that which he had thought to

hold most high and sacred. He was too sincere to be very proud; but he was sensitive, and he shrank from the rude ignoring of his vision. Perhaps, after all, he had better go away and keep it to himself.

Nevertheless, it was William who first came to the end of his rope.

"Barbara," he said one July morning, coming around the corner of the barn, just as Pete was being hitched into a farm wagon, "it's such a nice day, I want you to come and take a walk with me."

Barbara had not glanced up as she heard the approaching footsteps; she was wholly preoccupied with the task in hand and with the thought of the many duties which the day held in store for her. But the abrupt and unexpected nature of William's request was calculated to startle her, and it did not fail to do so.

"What?" She paused with her fingers on a strap. "What did you say?" she repeated.

"I said"—William took hold of another strap and began to unbuckle it—"let's take a walk."

Barbara looked quite at a loss. Take a walk at nine o'clock in the morning of a hay-making day! Had William lost his wits? Her bewildered concern gave an effective jar to her recent self-control, and loosened it. But she recovered it almost at once.

"Don't be absurd, William," she replied, fastening her strap and reaching for another.

"I'm not absurd; I mean it," he insisted, buckle for buckle unharnessing Pete on his side as fast as she secured him on the other. "Let's take a walk."

Barbara came to a full stop, and looked across the horse's back at her friend, who promptly profited by his chance to remove the headstall.

"William! Don't!" she expostulated. "Why—why—what is the matter with you? You know I can't leave my work to-day. It's hay time."

"Hang your work! Hang hay time!" said William cheerfully.

Pete was out of the shafts by this time, and on his no less cheerful way back to his stall. Barbara looked dazedly after him, her face visited by a conflict of feelings such as had not quickened it in a long time. She was vexed, she was puzzled, she was impatient; but at least she was alive and awake. William, glancing back at her, was not discontented with the effect he had begun to produce. Also, the eternal feminine in her was secretly pleased with the high-handed dealing. But William did not know that.

"It's a lovely day," he remarked again, as he closed the barn door and came back to her. "Shall we climb Spruce Hill?"

He smiled rallyingly into her face, summoning her to come out and meet him, to be his friend and comrade once more, to be herself with him. She did not smile back, but she took off her heavy driving gloves and laid them aside.

"I don't know what is the matter with you," she repeated mechanically.

"Matter? I tell you, it's a lovely day," he reiterated, closing the barnyard gate behind them and lead-

ing the way across the brook. "I actually don't believe you know that," he challenged her.

"I—why, is it?"

She followed along a few steps, then stopped, looked about her, and shook her head.

"William, really I can't," she said. "I'm going back."

"Barbara, please!"

He did not often deliberately pit his will against hers; but he did so now, earnestly facing her, half commanding, half coaxing her. She met his eyes, and hesitated. For a minute the balance hung. Then, "Very well," she said wearily, and once more followed him.

"So you didn't know it was a lovely day," he continued, persistently reintroducing the weather as if it were a neglected guest.

"Good for hay making," she answered, with a glance at her waving meadows.

"Good for hay, good for spirit," he met her. "Which is the more important?"

He spoke lightly enough, but she took his question quite seriously, and pondered it.

"Well, of course, I always used to think that spirit was," she replied at length; "but now I honestly think it's hay. Spirit can wait."

"Barbara!" Her tone of mature conviction discouraged him; but he continued to rally her. "You know you don't mean that. Spirit can go to seed as well as hay. When it's ripe it must be gathered. I've

got a fine crop of ideas to-day that can't wait another hour."

A certain stress in his voice caught her attention and roused her curiosity.

"What kind of ideas?" she questioned.

But, as she spoke, her eyes wandered anxiously over a field of timothy, and she ignored the answer.

"You'll see in a minute."

William turned short away from the meadows toward a high, rocky pasture, and hastened to put the Marshall farm behind a fold of the hill.

"Now! do you want to sit down? Are you tired?" he said, indicating a shady rock, when he thought they had walked far enough.

"Yes, I am, rather."

Barbara sat down on the grass and folded her hands in her lap, leaning back against the rock. Her face fell into listless lines, and she regarded the radiant summer world around her as if she had once more forgotten that the day was beautiful. William let her alone for some minutes. She seemed to him really very tired; and he wanted to give her a chance to find her old self again. He did not need a chance to watch her, for he already knew by heart the unhappy set of her lips and the constraint of her brows; but, having her there before him, he had no choice but to study her, and his heart yearned over her. Once more he addressed himself to the wholesome device of startling her.

"Barbara," he said, without preamble, "I had a special reason for asking you to come out with me to-day.

I am commissioned to make you an offer for the purchase of your farm."

Startled, was she? For a moment he thought he had gone too far in abruptness, and shocked her disastrously. She gazed at him with her eyes as wide as the spaces between the summer clouds. "What?—what did you say?" she murmured vaguely. She was petrified. But, before he could repeat his statement in a gentler form, she startled him in his turn by springing suddenly to her feet.

"William! Sell the farm!" she cried; and gave a choking little gasp that started out to be a shout, but found its freight of feeling too much for it.

Now William had had two motives in wishing to startle Barbara. One was that he might shake her out of her constraint; the other that he might entrap her into revealing her genuine feeling about the homestead. He thought he knew it pretty well, but he wanted to make sure. His success dazzled him. No lightning stroke ever made an obscure path clearer. From henceforth, forever, there was no doubt: she must be set free.

But it was well that he had used his abrupt method; for, no sooner had she sprung and cried, than she sat down again, folded her hands, and said,

"William, really what is the matter with you to-day? You do make the most absurd suggestions."

She herself seemed to be hardly aware of her own leaping confession.

"It's a man from the city," William went on, quietly ignoring her last remark. "He's got lots of money.

He offers you twenty thousand. I'd take it if I were you. He's a thoroughly nice man, Barbara. The homestead couldn't fall into better hands. He's got a wife and three or four children, and he wants to make a home in the country. He's retired from business. He seems to have all sorts of modern ideas about scientific farming; and, with the money to carry them out, he'll do better by the place than you ever could. He likes the old house immensely. If you hadn't been so busy lately you'd have noticed him hanging around. He's boarding in the village, and he comes up here almost every day. He told me he'd never seen a house that had so much personality. He'll keep it looking just as it is—only perhaps a little more cheerful—and he'll develop the farm in a line with your father's theories. Do let him have it, Barbara. It's a chance in a lifetime."

Barbara listened passively to this speech, making no comment with voice or eye. William was glad that, at least, a reaction did not lead her to repudiate the new idea as vigorously as she had at first so spontaneously embraced it. When he stopped and left his words to sink in, she sat silently, with her hands clasped about her knees. He waited anxiously.

"So you think that the house isn't cheerful?" she said at length, woman-like, choosing his parenthesis for her point of reply. Perhaps she thought that the other points were too much for her.

"Well—" he hesitated. "Do you?" he submitted finally.

"No—" she shook her head without looking at him,

her face impassive. "I think it's hateful; but I didn't know that any one else thought so too. How long have you thought so, William?"

"Why, more or less always, I guess."

He spoke judicially.

She did look at him then, her eyes full of surprise and a curious mingling of pain and relief.

"Really?"

"Always, at least," he went on, "since you began to grow up in it, and I saw what a misfit it was. You don't belong there. It isn't your home. You don't love it, and it doesn't love you. So of course——"

But at last he had gone too far and spoken too baldly. Barbara interrupted him.

"Why, William, I do! I do!" she expostulated.

It was a bewildering protest, coming on top of the so recent confession of the homestead's hatefulness; but William seemed to understand it. He sighed and made no comment. The reaction had come.

"It is my home, and I do belong there," Barbara went on indignantly. "I was born there; I've never lived anywhere else. What do you mean?"

"The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar,"

William quoted thoughtfully. "I think your grandfather brought your soul with him from overseas, and that's where you belong."

At the mention of her grandfather, Barbara's hand went as usual to the compass about her neck; but her mood did not suffer change.

"I'm a Marshall, my father and mother were Marshalls," she continued; "and I love them both. Of course I love the home which was theirs, which they left me. My mother's garden is rooted there. How can you talk to me of selling it? It's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible which one ought to do."

He was skilful in surprising her to-day, and so in checking her.

"Ought to do?"

She looked at him from under puzzled brows.

"Ought; yes, of course. Our spiritual duties are always more important than our physical ones; and the first of them is to be true to ourselves. You were born with rivers and seas in your blood, and you'll never amount to anything until you give them a chance."

"But—but—my father."

"He's dead now. He lived his life. He was true to himself. I rather think he was! You've no right to live his life over again. That's been done once for all. The world doesn't want stale repetitions, but fresh experiments."

"Reuben—the homestead—my mother's garden."

Barbara offered the disconnected words as if each was a complete argument. She looked deeply troubled.

"Nothing to the point, any of them. They don't really need you. And, anyway, it isn't yourself you're giving them, for you are not yourself. Don't insult them any longer by forcing a falsehood on them. Be yourself bravely, and give——"

But here William took his turn at breaking off suddenly in confusion. He had spoken with headlong energy, and had not perceived where he was coming out. To whom was Barbara to give herself when she had found herself? One obvious name sprang into both their minds. They read it, reflected in each other's eyes, and flushed reciprocally. Then the trust that always obtained between them prevailed to restore their balance.

"Well," said Barbara, "well——" She rose, evidently averse to pursuing the subject further. She gathered herself together with an effect of recovery and return. Her face had the look of one who wakes from a dream. "Really, William, I must go back." She turned away down the hill.

But she did not hurry, as she and William re-crossed the pasture and skirted the brook. On the contrary, she loitered so absent-mindedly that her friend, watching her, thought that she must be pondering his counsel. At the conviction his heart sank so low that he could hardly hear the sturdy "Hurrah!" which he authorized it to give. He had no misgivings, no doubts, no regrets. He knew that Barbara must yield her farm; he would do anything to help her to do so. But there was no blinking the desolation which the result would mean for him.

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not notice what progress their returning feet made over the pasture; and when Barbara stopped beside him he looked up inquiringly to see what had arrested her. They had topped the crest of a little ridge on the

rolling hillside, and Marshall Hollow had come into view beneath them. The buildings and fields of the Marshall farm lay at their feet. The old house stood with its back to them, paying no more heed to them than to the hawk that circled above the hill. It was intent on the meadow before it, where, in spite of the mistress's absence, the hay making was going forward. Watchful, alert, it stood under its trees, losing no turn of the reaping machine, commanding the whole situation. But, though it ignored the two on the hill, its command included them; and its preoccupied back rebuked them more impressively than its full face could have done. William had no need to ask Barbara why she had paused, nor to wonder what change had come over her spirit as she stood long at gaze. He anticipated the words with which she finally turned to him:

"William, you must tell the man from the city that my farm is not for sale."

He left her at the kitchen door, and, without further comment, went away over the fields toward his home. At a bend in the path he turned and looked back. The homestead still paid no attention to him. Gazing obliquely away from him, it continued to contemplate the mown meadow where the noon hour had now brought respite from labor. But, as on the hillside, an hour ago, there was something worse than attention in its insulting neglect.

"Curse you!" said William, under his breath. Then, aloud, that there be no misunderstanding, "Curse you, old hag!"

XXII

DANIEL remembered enough about farming to understand that late summer permits a slackening of the pace at which work is done; and he looked forward to August with a renewal of hope. Surely as soon as Barbara's hands were a little less full and her mind had a chance to look beyond immediately pressing demands, she would again find time for him and their friendship, she would relent towards him. The very mood of the maturing season is quieting to sensitive souls. She must be affected by it. When, therefore, the hay was all in and the early potatoes harvested, he once more resumed his homestead hauntings. (During a part of July he had been away, lecturing in a neighboring town.) He had a feeling that this was the last attempt he could ever make; that, if the friendship failed him now, he must go away and leave it.

Barbara was fully aware of the pausing mood of the year. She had always loved August; and had, heretofore, responded to it with a whole-hearted pause on her own part, with a glad giving over of the stress of life. But this year she feared it; and when it came she did her best to avoid it. Behind the crowd of her daily duties there loomed always those other interests, those dreams and wanderings, those dear

freedoms, which she had renounced. It was only by keeping herself in the thick of preoccupation that she could ever lose sight of them. When the exactions of life began of their own accord to give way about her she felt like an unwilling traveler, coming out of a safe, sheltering wood into a dangerous swamp.

It was then that Reuben had most cause to deplore his sister's obstinacy. She set herself to the prosecution of tasks which were not only unnecessary, but which she really could not afford.

"Barbara Marshall, I tell you, you've got improvement on the brain. You've done mighty well by the farm this summer; everybody knows that. But it's as bad to go too far as not to do enough. You don't need a new sap house; the old one will last a year or two yet. And what's the sense of drainin' that meadow? Leastways, until you can afford it better than you can this year."

This sort of remonstrance grew familiar enough to Barbara. Reuben saw to that. But her perversity chose to use it as a spur instead of a check. The more insistently he talked the faster she laid her plans. Since he criticized her extravagance she dismissed one of her helpers, and did the lighter field work herself. She was glad of the excuse.

Invented activity, however, can never be so effective as genuine necessity. There is always a flaw in it, and it fails to convince and absorb. Barbara's hands were fully employed with her new sap house; but her mind was insistently, uneasily aware that the constraint was artificial, and therefore it refused full

obedience. Again and again she caught it back from the brink of her hidden sea, from the gates of Rome, from the Acropolis of Athens, from the Egyptian desert. It tormented her. Daniel, watching her troubled face, read her condition more clearly than she did herself, and bided his time. He did not forget how suddenly she had relented to him three months before.

One evening Fate favored him by bringing his wandering feet unexpectedly across her path, as she returned from a twilight inspection of a distant field. He had not intended to seek her that evening. She had been very perverse of late, and he was rather discouraged; he wanted the healing touch of the always untroubled hills. He was even a little sorry when he found himself face to face with her. If he had seen her coming, he would have avoided her. This instinctive regret on his part betrayed itself in his manner, and worked for him. No woman can remain unconcerned by the indifference of a man whom she likes. The shock of sudden encounter was good for them both. It called for a readjustment and a change of attitude.

"Oh!" said Barbara. "Oh! it's you."

She had been walking slowly, with her eyes on the evening star, trembling in the clear gold of the sunset above the dusky hill; and, in spite of herself, she had not been thinking about her buckwheat field. The mood of the hour was too much for her. The whole day had been full of dreams. Silent, misty, the hills had brooded about the hushed valley; and great slow

the night—this of the moon. The pulsing song of the crickets and grasshoppers seems to come to an imperceptible pause, then to begin again on another key. The hills stir and sigh and select a new dream. No meadow or brook remains unaware of the gracious arrival. So with Daniel and Barbara. He broke off in the midst of his description. She said, "Oh!" softly. And they both turned and looked at each other.

They could read each other's eyes clearly now. The full golden radiance flooded them. What did they find there? Bewilderment, doubtless; the dizziness of a headlong return through leagues of space. A minute before they had been in Italy; now they stood on a New England hillside. But they must have found more than amazement to hold them gazing so long.

"Barbara!" Daniel breathed.

"Daniel!"

She let him gather her hands into his and hold them closely.

"You'll come with me now?"

She did not reply to this; but when his arms went about her, she yielded to him and laid her head passively on his shoulder.

William came on this scene so abruptly that he barely saved himself from interrupting it. He had wanted to speak to Barbara; and, learning from Priscilla where she had gone, he had followed her. But, having found her, he seemed suddenly to decide that his errand could wait. Noiseless as any wild night creature he gathered himself together and withdrew.

His face was pale in the moonlight, but his lips were steady. Over the fields and down the hill he went home more rapidly than he had come; and only when he stood on his doorstep did he let himself pause and turn to look back over the valley. Then, "My God!" he said half aloud; and, for perhaps the second or third time in his life, there were tears in his eyes.

XXIII

POOOR William! He was disgusted with himself that he so dreaded to meet the radiance of Barbara's face the next morning. A fine lover, he! Was not the happiness of his beloved his most precious concern in the world, the one thing for which he would sacrifice all other interests? Yes, he could truly say that it was. He had no slightest intention or fear of failing her in the present crisis; but he simply could not bring himself to want to meet her eyes. He had often wondered how those dear lakes would look, transfigured by the light of love; and now he would have gone to the ends of the earth to avoid them, if he possibly could.

But he could not. Last night's development was precisely in a line with the venture which he had urged upon Barbara; and he must help her to put the thing through smoothly. He was at her door before she had quite finished breakfast.

When he heard her coming to let him in he dropped his eyes to steel them; then he looked at her quickly and bravely, and—lost his mental balance. A glance prepared to deal with radiance does not know what to do when it finds itself encountering trouble. Barbara's face had never presented a more cheerless front.

"My dear child!"

He was so disconcerted that he could not help the startled exclamation. But he recovered himself at once. He did not intend to betray his knowledge of last evening's event.

"I guess you didn't sleep well," he went on, in a more casual tone. "Are you going out to work?"

He glanced at her short skirt and heavy boots.

"Yes, right away," she replied in a mechanical voice.

"May I come with you?"

His eyes expressed more of his solicitude than he thought it wise to allow to his voice; and they proved their superior wisdom by the effect which they had on Barbara. Her own eyes softened and faltered.

"Why, yes, of course, if you want to," she answered.

He had to wait for at least fifteen minutes, while she lingered in her mother's garden. There was not much to be done there; but she invented duties, picking off dead leaves and straightening wind-blown stems. Her face had in it a brooding lightning of tenderness. As she at last moved away, she turned several times and looked back at the blossoming plants. Meantime, she said not a word to William, nor he to her.

He was at a loss. He could not gauge her unexpected mood, and he was afraid of hurting her by some ill-considered turn. He walked silently beside her, wondering what he should say or do. But he need not have troubled himself. Unconsciously to them both, the influence of his presence quieted her;

and, before very long, she rewarded him by coming to the very point which he had had in mind when he had sought her out this morning.

"Daniel Pritchard wants me to marry him," she said impassively, with her eyes on a distant hill.

"Well?"

In spite of himself and to his increased disgust, William winced. But he did not show it. The one careful word which he entrusted to his voice was steady enough.

"Oh! I don't know, William."

She turned her eyes swiftly upon him, and he saw how deeply troubled she was. There was in her glance an appeal which roused the veriest man in him, so that he no longer needed to steel himself. He genuinely wanted to do his utmost to help her.

"Can't we sit down and talk a while?" he suggested.

But Barbara did not want to sit down. Perhaps she disliked the appearance of committing herself to a discussion which must needs be painful, and preferred to hold herself ready to escape at any moment. She stopped and leaned against the bars of the corn-field, where they had now arrived; and said nothing for some minutes. In fact, she was silent so long that William, who wanted to get this thing over with, ventured to jog her gently.

"You love him, don't you, Barbara?"

But, after all, that hint was not so very gentle—at least, not in its effect. Barbara started and shrank and colored to the roots of her hair.

William colored a little, himself. Then, with pleading apology in his eyes—which, unfortunately, she did not see—and with strong tenderness in his voice—which she could not choose but hear—he repeated his question.

"I think you must love him, Barbara. You and he are exactly suited to each other. Love is the best thing that comes to any of us. We needn't be afraid of it. Tell me, Barbara, you do love him, don't you?"

He could not pretend to fathom the gaze which she slowly turned on him, holding him for a breathless moment. There were mysteries in it which he had never glimpsed before. He felt that she did not understand it herself, did not know what she was groping to say; and he waited tensely to hear her speak.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said.

He would have sworn that this was exactly the answer that he had expected of her; yet, when he received it, he felt inexpressibly chilled and disappointed. That was strange. He was ashamed of himself, and made all haste to temper his voice to reply promptly and evenly,

"Good! Then of course you want me to see about selling the homestead."

Again Barbara shrank—this time with a gesture of repudiation.

"Oh! no, William," she cried. "No, no, indeed!"

"But, dear child!" He leaned his arms on the bar of the gate, and soberly addressed himself to argument. "You must. It's a providential chance, a chance of chances. It's your duty, too. You can't

ask Daniel to tie himself up here when he has just begun the work he wants to do."

Barbara shook her head.

"I don't ask him," she said in a muffled voice.

"But—but——"

William was again at a loss. He did not want to say crudely, "Aren't you going to marry him?" Therefore he fell silent, and once more his forbearance was rewarded.

"I wrote him a note early this morning to say that I couldn't think of it," Barbara stated dispassionately.

Then suddenly William's words were let loose. Strangely, perversely enough, his heart's very leap of relief set him fervently pleading the cause that had fettered that unruly organ. He turned squarely facing the girl; he compelled her reluctant eyes to meet his; and, for many minutes, he gave free rein to argument, persuasion, even rebuke, such as he had never before employed with her. He told her, in effect, that she was foolish and morbid to let herself be bound by tradition instead of living her own spontaneous life. He warned her that Heaven-sent chances, if scorned, seldom return; that the gods are just and punish us for wilful negligence. He assured her that her duty was to the living lover who wanted her, rather than to the dead father and mother who had no need of her. As for her duty to the homestead, what could be better for it than to hand it over to capable, enthusiastic people who would give it the fullest development it had ever had? He ended by becoming rather vexed with her for her continued silence and unre-

sponsiveness—though, all the time, his anxious heart exulted to perceive it.

"You're a silly girl. I've half a mind to wash my hands of you," he brought out impatiently.

Barbara slowly turned pale, as William let loose upon her this unprecedented storm. She had not dreamed that he could think or talk so violently. Gradually, her eyes lost all expression save an appalled dismay. When he ended on his note of vexation, she said faintly:

"No, no, William! Please! I'll do what you think best."

"You'll sell the farm?"

Like a swiftly subsiding wave, the animation went out of his voice. The minute he gained his abhorred purpose his heart turned on him. But his will held its ground.

"Yes," she faltered.

"And you'll marry Daniel?"

"Yes," she lamented.

"Very well, then. Now come back to the house. For of course he's there, waiting for you, in a nice state of mind."

He started away down the hill, and she followed obediently. How many centuries of Christian civilization had gone to make it possible that all that force of masculine command should be put forth on the beloved woman to hand her over to another man!

Daniel was indeed waiting; and his state of mind might be inferred from the bewildered trouble of his eyes and forehead. He did not come forward to meet

the pair—his cue was too uncertain for him to risk any action; but he eyed them anxiously from the edge of the orchard, where he watched their descent of the hill. As on the similar occasion (so dissimilar in result!) when he had foiled Dick Marshall, William allowed himself to make it perfectly evident that he was the most important person in the transaction.

"See, I have won her for you," his manner said as plainly as words.

He left them together in the orchard, and made off across the fields, walking as violently as he had recently talked. There was something crude and fierce in the mood which had resulted from his conflicting feelings and purposes. His usual patience was entirely submerged. Having such dire need of his will to-day, he had given rather too much rein to that imperious faculty, and was now uncompromisingly governed by it. It led him to turn aside into a field where he saw Reuben Marshall at work. Better take this bull also at once by the horns, better tackle this difficulty and get it over with. He did not stop to consult his discretion. He had no discretion; he had only a desperate purpose, with an arrow in its heart.

"Reuben," he said, when the younger man was within ear-shot, "I have just come from the homestead, and I may as well tell you that Barbara is going to marry Daniel Pritchard, and is going to sell the farm to a man from New York."

He threw back his head and waited defiantly to see the result of his words. It is not improbable that he hoped that Reuben would fly at him.

But when he had to repeat his statement he perceived that he had overshot his mark; and the result of that was to begin to bring him to his usual sad senses. Having impressed the truth upon Reuben's horrified and incredulous brain, having seen the dismayed brother drop his hoe and start for the homestead, William went on his sober way, subdued and depressed.

"I ought not to have done that," he chided himself. "He'll frighten her, coming on her so suddenly. And—and—he'll interrupt her."

He entered his uninviting home too despondently to notice how particularly dreary it was.

XXIV

MARTHA SLOAN had not been able to run so fast from one occupation to another that she could outstrip the unseen pursuer from whom she fled. Rather, she had run into its arms, and was cruelly clutched.

The change in her had been so gradual that William, waking at last to the realization that she was insane, had felt his own brain reel. There seemed, for the most part, little difference between the woman of to-day and the woman of a year ago; yet the one had been sane, and the other was unquestionably mad. Where lay the all-significant boundary line between the two conditions? Or is there no such line?

He reproached himself bitterly. Sheer loneliness had done this thing, had shut his mother in on herself, until, through satiety and suffocation, she had lost herself. He ought to have seen to it that the door was kept ajar. But, even as he thus took himself to task, he knew in his inmost heart that he was innocent. The door had been shut long ago, before he was old enough to understand the situation; and the prisoner herself had kept it barred. Again and again, he had knocked, only to be sent away, baffled and chilled.

Whose was the fault, then? There must be some fault when a human life is thus hopelessly perverted?

His father's? He was a silent, preoccupied man, always intent on his work. But his mother had liked that. Her husband was precisely the kind of man she admired. He would have puzzled and annoyed her by giving her more of his society. No, there was no one to blame—unless it was circumstance, environment. Fettered natures, like Martha's, should be cast into crowded city streets, where, in spite of themselves, they must give and take.

Just before the first complete surrender of her reason Martha had seemed to come to a realization of what was impending and of the cause of it; and she had made a pitiful, belated effort to save the day. Having locked herself in, she tried to draw the bolt, and found, to her unspeakable dismay, that it was rusted fast.

William never forgot the evening when he found his mother waiting for him by the gate in the moonlight. How long she had been there he never knew; but she was shivering, and her eyes were tired. He thought that she started to put out her hand, and his own hand responded instinctively, though he was much surprised. But instantly she drew back and wrapped her arms in her shawl.

"Been with Barb'ry Marshall, I s'pose!" she snapped irritably.

By some strange, uncalculated sense he knew that this was not what she had meant to say, and he did not answer it. Instead, he tried to secure her arm and draw it through his, as they both turned toward the house. The attempt was successful, mechani-

cally; but the unaccustomed contact rendered them rigid, and they could neither of them think of anything to say as, angular and embarrassed, they walked up the path.

Indoors the situation was still more difficult, for they could see each other's faces and read their mutual constraint. To be made to feel herself foolish was the last thing that was likely to help Martha.

"Don't stand gaping at me like that!" she said, twitching her shawl from her shoulders, and going to the stove, where a kettle had tactlessly taken occasion to boil over.

The sight of the kettle touched William with a poignant realization of his mother's need. She would never have left it boiling and gone off and forgotten it if she had not been preoccupied by some unusual necessity. She had really wanted him.

"Mother!" he said, with a genuine throb of filial solicitude in his voice. He took a step forward and held out his hand. "Mother! I wish——"

But he got no chance to express his desire before the answer came, smarting on his cheek. Martha turned and struck him. With wild entreaty in her despairing eyes she spat at him. After that she sat down in a corner, and laughed and cried herself into a state of exhaustion.

The next day she was quiet again. William had spent a sleepless night, listening at her door and wondering what he ought to do. Like most country people, he had a horror of all public places of ministration—hospitals, asylums, and the like—and he knew

that his mother would never knowingly consign herself to one of them. Unless she was wholly beside herself, she would be wretched there. Before the new day broke he had, therefore, all but decided to keep her at home, no matter how much worse she became; and, when he found her apparently rational once more, he went about his work with an anxious foreboding in his heart, but with a resolution to keep his own counsel and let things take their course.

He did not flatter himself that the sinister tendency would relent, that he would ever again feel secure in his home life. But he thought—nay, he knew—himself strong enough to bear the burden; and he wanted to shield his mother from the comments of her neighbors. He did not forget how carefully she had always kept the secret that his father had once had a small tumor removed from his side.

Of course he was not wholly successful in his policy of reserve. His mother's frenzies, once precipitated, grew more and more frequent; and rumors of them crept about the countryside. But since he said nothing to any one, no one said anything to him; and it was only from occasional glances that he ever suspected the universal solicitude. Not even to Barbara—especially not to Barbara—did he unburden his heart of its anxiety.

Martha's distractions were generally not of the violent kind. She talked and laughed and cried a good deal, making up for the long lack of utterance in her life, playing both parts of the vital duet which experience had denied her. Sometimes she burned

the food; sometimes she rearranged the furniture fantastically; oftener she left it chaotically unarranged. But real mischief never seemed to occur to her. William was doubly thankful for that. No one could justly criticize him for keeping her at home.

When, however, on his return from delivering Barbara to Daniel he had stood inside his kitchen door long enough for the familiar environment to penetrate his absorption and claim the action of his senses, he suddenly became aware that something was wrong. Very wrong. It was not the kitchen itself that warned him. That looked as usual, only, perhaps, a little more dreary. Martha's one household grace had been order; and, when that failed her, her home abandoned itself to a desolation of cheerlessness. The chairs stood undusted, unwashed dishes piled the sink, towels strewn the floor. But William's eyes ignored these disconsolations, and sped to the door of the stairway, whence a fine blue smoke stole down from the upper floor. With a spring and a bound he was across the room and up the stairs.

His mother looked up almost affably from the middle of his bedroom floor, where she was busily fanning the flame of a fire she had just started with a huge pile of books.

"They're Barb'ry's books, ain't they?" she inquired. "Leastways, you read 'em to her. Well, you see, I'm burnin' 'em up. That'll be good riddance, won't it?"

She made no resistance when he swept her aside and dashed the contents of his bath-tub on the flames. His abruptness seemed to bring her somewhat to her

senses, to make her realize what she had done; and she was both ashamed and defiant. She muttered something about "feeling cold," about wanting to "get rid of useless rubbish," about guessing she knew what to do in her own house. But during the rest of the morning she brooded in a forbidding mood.

William felt more nearly distracted than at any time during the last few trying weeks. The strain of his session with Barbara had tired him inevitably; yet he could not let up on the tension there, for the demand was not over. As he went about the household tasks which his mother was to-day unable to perform—clearing up the grim disorder of his room, putting the kitchen to rights, preparing something for dinner—his thoughts were occupied even more with his friend than with his own family anxieties. He felt that he had wronged her by turning Reuben so suddenly loose on her, and then leaving her alone to deal with the resulting situation. Having committed the first mistake, he should have followed it up by going to defend her from her brother. Yet what if he had done so! He shivered, as he looked at his poor, distraught mother and thought of the fiery doom that was all but upon her when he came to the rescue. Heaven must have sent the weakness of heart that had made it impossible for him to return immediately to the homestead.

He was strong again now, however. At least, he thought so. Certainly he was possessed by a mounting desire to go and learn just what had happened, to make an end of all final mists of uncertainty lin-

gering in his heart. They tormented him, those mists; for where they were, hope would forever persist in lifting up her head. Late afternoon found him almost as restless as his unhappy mother. He dared not leave home; yet he could hardly hold himself away from Barbara.

His mother dimly perceived his uneasiness, and took a cunning, if half-unconscious, delight in augmenting it. Her sullen mood of the morning had passed into one of extreme loquaciousness, and she prattled incessantly and very unamiably. Her main theme was Barbara: lazy, selfish, good-for-nothin' girl that she was, a disgrace to her family, a warnin' to all other families! Did William know how she was carryin' on with a play-actor fellow? Some day she'd run away with him; and then there'd be a scandal, but also a mighty good riddance.

William made himself bear all this talk, poignantly distasteful and distressing though it was to him. His poor mother was not responsible. He must not even let himself feel angry with her. But as the afternoon wore on and passed into the evening, his face grew more and more haggard with the suppressed and complicated anguish of his spirit.

When the lamps were lighted and he had persuaded his mother to drink a little warm milk, he hoped that the usual reaction of great fatigue would set in with her and that she would fall asleep. But until nearly midnight she was incessantly active. She insisted on taking everything out of the sitting-room and sweeping the carpet and even washing the windows. She

got down from a shelf some pieces of ancestral silver and polished them. William could only look on, lending her an occasional helping hand, and pray that the frenzy might soon spend itself.

Just as the clock was striking twelve he was relieved to see her sit down in a chair by the table and, with a great rending sigh of weariness, lean her head on her hand. As he came over to her she looked up into his face with a pitiful appeal.

"Tired out, aren't you?" he said gently. "Well, it's time to go to bed."

He put his hand on her shoulder; then, as she made no protest, he gathered her into his arms and carried her up to her room. For the first time that he remembered, she clung to him, and he thought he heard her give a little sob. Whereupon he patted her back awkwardly with his big, clumsy hand. But she was already sound asleep when he laid her on her bed.

Covering her carefully and pulling down the shades of the windows, he stood looking at her a minute, his heart heavy with compassion. How shrunk, how abject, how hopeless she seemed! And he could do nothing for her. The pity of her life tragedy was beyond compare. But presently his own restless preoccupation began to return upon him, and he wandered downstairs and stood in the open kitchen door, looking out into the night.

It was now too late to go to Barbara, but it seemed to him that he must go somewhere. He felt a great need of air and space, of the solace of the hills. Dared he leave his mother? He had never known

her to sleep less than five or six hours after a frenzy, and this attack had lasted so long that he thought she would probably feel the reaction for several days. Yes, surely, she was safe.

With his head bent and his hands clasped behind him, he went out under the stars. The silent, shadowy hills had need of eternities of solace if they were to bring him peace.



XXV

TWO or three hours later he found himself climbing the hill on which he had so often sat with Barbara. He did not know quite how he had come here nor where he had been in the interim since leaving his house. He did not want to know. It was better to leave in obscurity as much of that agonized wandering as possible.

He had a vague impression that he had circled the homestead several times, and that there had been a light in Barbara's window. Yes, he was sure of that. The steady ray had signified all sorts of things in the way of a wakeful acceptance of destiny, a glad giving over of old doubts and fears; and it had hurt him intolerably, while yet he had hailed it with triumphant acquiescence. It was all right, it was the one thing for which he had lived and worked and prayed: Barbara was free, she was going away, she was about to realize all her splendid capacities for spiritual life and growth, she was saved from her destruction. Yet her new birth and salvation meant nothing less to him than the end of all earthly interests. How was he going to stand it? William was in the throes of that bitterest of discoveries: that a self-emptying devotion does not necessarily bring a reward of peace, but often tries to the uttermost the heart that makes

it. He could nerve himself to the actual putting away of his love; the subsequent endurance was another thing.

As he set his face to the hill, the first faint indications of dawn were in the sky. The stars grew a little paler, and the east quickened obscurely. The change did not cheer him. He preferred darkness and silence, and made haste to hide himself in the shadows of the forest. But dawn is a penetrating thing, a matter of the whole atmosphere rather than of the mere eastern sky; and, before long, the dim light was stealing forth from among the silent trees. Then a bird called in the distance, a squirrel woke and stirred, the sound of the brook was borne on a morning breeze; and William knew that, whether he had courage for it or not, another day was upon him.

He climbed slowly, because he had no particular object in climbing at all, and because he was very tired; and when he came out on the summit the whole world was glimmering in the gray dawn light. The valley below him was filled with white mist. It was infinitely peaceful. The slopes of the surrounding mountains stood out against one another and against the pale blue sky. The scene and the hour would ordinarily have hushed William with a blessed sense of the abiding rightness of things; but this morning he almost hated them. He threw himself on the ground and hid his face in his arms.

He had lain there long enough to feel the strength of the mountain invade him in spite of himself and to grow, therefore, insensibly, a little quieter when

he heard some one coming up the mountain path. At once he lifted his head, and a strangely commingled look of leaping welcome and apprehensive fear sprang into his worn face. Woodsman and lover, he did not have to think twice to know that the approaching footstep was human and that it was Barbara's. Should he spring to meet her? Should he run away? He decided the matter by staying just where he was, lying almost hidden at the foot of a great rock.

She did not see him when she emerged from the forest and stood looking out over the dawn-summoned world. She did not seem to see anything—even the view for whose sake she must have come. Her face had a baffled and blinded look, an entirely hopeless questing. She seemed to have come to the end of something, and to be appalled by the realization that, though it was indubitably the end, still she had to go on. With all his experience of her William had never known her to look so unhappy. He gazed at her, spellbound with perplexity and pity, for the first time sharing the despair which lay in her eyes.

But this mood did not last long with him. As soon as he understood that her tormented destiny was not yet settled, after all, that there was still something which he could do for her, the weary anguish of the last few hours left him, and his brain cleared, and his heart steadied itself. He did not speak to her, for he wanted to watch her a minute and give free scope to a sudden darting suspicion that perhaps, with all his lifelong study of her, he did not fully understand her, that there was something there, something

—he knit his brows. It took all his native humility to admit, even to himself, that there was anything in Barbara which he had not fathomed. His whole soul stood up within him, scorning his fatigue, bending all its energies on the track of a new surmise.

But he had time to make no progress; for, as he gazed at her, she turned and looked at him.

"Why, William!"

Her tone gave the impression of assuming that she was surprised, then of discovering that, strangely enough, she was not, and of accepting the essential inevitableness of the situation. She certainly had not known he was there; yet, just as certainly, she had come to find him.

"William!"

She held out her hand and invited him to come and sit beside her.

The sea of mist at their feet was moving and breaking a little now. Patches of meadow-land were beginning to show through it here and there, and clumps of trees emerged into solid seeming. From the chimneys of the scattered houses rose a faint blue smoke. The two hilltop watchers looked on in silence, and both their faces fell into quieter lines. The day was coming. Well, perhaps, after all, they could manage to be ready for it.

"When are you going, Barbara?"

William spoke first, feeling his way, guardedly watching the face of his companion. His tone was as matter-of-course as he could make it. She did not

turn on him, as he had perhaps expected; but she waited a minute before replying.

"William, I don't know."

"But you are going?"

"Not with Daniel."

Then she did turn and look at him; and again the darting suspicion thrilled him that there was something in her which he did not understand. He held her eyes as long as he could, but she soon looked away again.

"You don't love him?" he ventured, speaking in a voice whose thickness disconcerted him.

"No." She shook her head. "I never have loved him, and he has never really loved me. That isn't love."

There was a certain vibration in her voice as she spoke the last words, which was quite too much for William. He got up roughly and went and sat on a tree-trunk facing her. His unhappy eyes looked almost hard as he challenged her. Yet there was a leaping relief in them, too.

"Daniel isn't the point, Barbara," he said. "If you had loved him, it would have made things easier for you. But the point is the homestead: you simply must go away from it. Now you've got to go all alone. When will you start?"

"Yes," he went right on, giving her hardly time for the reply which was not forthcoming, "you must go, Barbara, and you must go of your own accord. I can't tell you how important this crisis seems to me. I will confess to you now that twice I have been on

the point of burning the homestead. It is your evil genius, your power of darkness. And it wasn't the legal offense that stopped me. I would gladly have paid my last cent and gone to prison for the sake of setting you free. But I knew that one person can't force freedom on another, that each must win it for himself. If I had burned the homestead your spirit might still have been in bondage to the idea of it. So I've waited and waited, and suffered, and pleaded, and feared and hoped—oh, Barbara!"—his voice broke suddenly, hammered by the fierce beating of his heart, and he turned away, clenching his hands and looking blindly down into the valley—"may you never know what it means to stand helpless before the destiny that is all the world to you."

He had not known he was going to say this; he certainly had not intended to. The unexpected conversation had run a still more unexpected course, taking a swift plunge to an unforeseen conclusion. He was appalled at the possible consequences, and, standing with his back to Barbara, tried to recover himself, while the echoes of his last choking cry went beating about his ears.

But he had not time even to clear the mists from his eyes before she spoke to him, and her voice was choking, too.

"William?"

He paid no attention to her, so she took a step nearer him.

"William?"

His nails bit into his palms as he turned back to

her, he had such great need of his self-control. But when he saw her eyes he was so carried out of himself by amazement that all his members relaxed. For as much as a minute he stood staring limply and silently at her.

Then he suddenly lifted his hands to his face with a desperate gesture, as if he were fending off an all but annihilating revelation, and took a step backward, away from her.

"No, Barbara! No!" he cried. "It can't be so. No! no! Barbara."

His voice was strangely sharp and hard. He covered his eyes.

"No! no! no!" he said again. "No, Barbara!"

"Wait!" then he added sternly.

He took his stand at some little distance from her, with his back against a tree, and made himself look at her. At once a great light sprang into his eyes, but he fought it down.

"Will you give me your promise to go away, Barbara?" he demanded imperatively.

"Yes, William," she answered slowly.

"No matter what happens? Even if you have to go quite alone?"

She hesitated and looked at him questioningly.

"It's more important than anything," he told her gravely. "Than *anything*."

The word throbbed on his tongue.

She hesitated a moment longer, looking out over the hills in the direction of the homestead; then she opened her hands in a gesture of acquiescence.

"Yes, no matter what happens, I will go. I promise you."

"Then—oh, Barbara, darling!"—he could hardly speak, the tears rained down his cheeks—"will you let me go with you?"

He opened his arms.

When the sun rose they were sitting close together on the edge of the hill, and neither of them had yet said a word. Their faces were dazed and bewildered, but flooded with reassurance. For a long time it had seemed as if they would never again have need of any speech; but gradually their very amazement drove them to taking counsel with each other.

"Barbara," William began, groping his way in his singing darkness, "how—what—are you sure?"

"Don't you know that I am?" she responded.

"Yes, but—when did you find out?"

"Just when I told you about it. Haven't we been blind?"

"Speak for yourself. I haven't been. I have loved you all my life."

"So have I," she echoed confidently. "Why, of course—why, of *course*, I have loved you, William. I've hardly done anything else. You ought to have known it—you who knew everything else about me. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Yes, I repeat, we have both of us been incredibly blind."

"Well"—he folded her closer—"we both have our eyes open now. Only—I can't believe it."

He shook his head and relapsed once more into his amazement.

"Shall we sell the homestead?"

That was just the right question on her part to give him the pull he needed back to the ordinary world. He sat up a little straighter, and turned and smiled at her.

"That's my brave girl! Of course we'll sell it." He passed his hand over his forehead and drew a long breath. "Perhaps I'll sell my farm, too. I've never said anything about it, nor even thought much of it, for it didn't seem to the point; but the truth is that I have always wanted to see Italy. The trouble is"—his face clouded and he paused—"how best to provide for my mother. You know—you know, don't you, Barbara, that she is insane?"

The girl softly put her lips to his cheek.

"Can't we sell the homestead, and keep your farm, and stay home and take care of her?" she suggested tenderly.

"No!" He shook his head vigorously. "Not even if you have to go away without me for a while. You—must—go—away."

"Perhaps you don't know," he went on after a moment, "that an uncle of mine, my mother's brother, died in Colorado a few months ago, and left us both some money. If my mother would be content in some sort of a sanitarium that would be the best place for her. Heaven knows she's not contented at home. And she's growing dangerous. Yesterday she lighted

a fire in the middle of my bedroom. We might try sending her away and see how the plan works."

His face darkened still more ruefully. Then he swept it clear with a sudden effort of his will.

"I want you to understand, Barbara," he said resolutely, "that, just as I have never let anything interfere with what I conceived to be your welfare, so I am never going to let anything interfere with it. I will take care of my mother, of course. But you must go away. Everything always comes back to that."

"Oh, William!" Barbara lifted her face with one of the quick changes of mood that were so characteristic of her. Her eyes shone, her lips parted, and presently she rose to her feet. "For the first time I seem to understand what that means: to go away. Always before it meant leaving you, perhaps leaving you forever. But now"—her mood mounted, she spread out her arms, facing the wide world below her as if she would fly forth over it—"now it means freedom and growth and delight, it means beauty and knowledge, it means experience; above all, it means love. Oh, William! I am too happy for words. I am going away."

It would seem as if William might have already felt himself sufficiently rewarded by this morning's consummation; but, as he watched Barbara's glowing face, he recognized the supreme recompense of his life. She was free. He need have no further fears for her. Her destiny had fully and finally spread its wings, and soared into the open sky where it belonged.

XXVI

THEY made no haste down the hill. The hour was still early, and they had the whole day before them. Moreover, although in a sense they were eager to put their new plans into action, in another sense they shrank from the stress and difficulty that inevitably awaited them. They wanted to linger a little longer in the sweet security of their unchallenged purpose. Yet again their new necessity of walking hand in hand involved them in many delays along the narrow path.

"Do you remember how I used to dread coming out of the woods and getting my first sight of the homestead?" Barbara mused, as they neared the edge of the forest, "and how you had fairly to drag me forward sometimes? I don't feel that way to-day. I'm not afraid of it. I wonder why."

She stopped and looked up into her lover's face with puzzled eyes.

"Is it just because I have made up my mind? Just because I love you? No, it seems to go deeper even than that. I am not the same person I was. Something has changed me."

"Something has released you, you mean," William answered promptly, yet with an immediately succeeding effect of absent-mindedness—as if his atten-

tion had waited only long enough to deliver a required response before darting off on a new track. Barbara had been too absorbed in her thoughts to notice it, but for several rods of their downward progress William had been uneasy. He had imperceptibly quickened his pace, and had held his head high, scenting the breeze and listening acutely. It had seemed to him that something was wrong off there in the distance—something, he did not know what. There was a rumor in the air, and there was a pungency. When Barbara stopped and looked into his face she, too, was troubled; and, when he did not stop in his turn, but hurried on, she hurried after him.

"What is the matter, William? I—— Oh, come! Let us run."

She turned very pale, and the high serenity of her eyes was shot through with an apprehension which was none the less alarming for its formlessness. She also had detected the rumor and the pungency.

As on so many former occasions, she outstripped her lover in their descent of the forest path; but she did not, as usual, wait for him within the edge of the woods. He tried to hold her back.

"Barbara! Wait, dear. Let me go first."

But, not heeding, perhaps not even hearing, his call, she dashed out into the open field, and he followed her.

Below them the morning valley lay in all the fresh tranquillity of sunshine and dew. Long shadows stretched their cool fingers caressingly over it, and

bird songs vibrated through the air. It was a scene of quiet assurance and security. But, on the edge of it, on the slope of the mountain, just below William and Barbara, rose a dense cloud of smoke. It was like a storm cloud, driven by a fierce wind. Even at a distance the rush and volume of it were felt to be terrific. Its edges snapped and flew, great banners and streamers of it were borne about the neighboring fields. In its heart, and sometimes shooting all through it, were tongues and columns of flame. It was a mighty, defiant thing, an irresistible force.

Barbara gave only one cry. It echoed in William's heart all his life long, but she was unconscious of it. Then she fled down the hill, stopping not for the winding pathway, but plunging straight over steep rocky slopes, over brooks, over bogs and fences. It mattered not to her that her limbs were soon bruised, her clothes torn, her hands bleeding. She was as unconscious of them as of her own sobbing breath. When she came out by the burning homestead she was a woeful figure. The crowding neighbors instinctively stood a little aside to give her grief privacy.

The roof had not yet fallen, but it was plain that that consummation was at hand. Through all the windows and along the eaves the flames were climbing, leaping. The walls were riddled, one or two of the beams tottered ominously. In every direction flew the sparks, like swarms of golden bees. The rush and tumult of the flames made a great shouting chorus.

There was nothing to be done. In a corner of the ruined garden William noticed a small heap of furniture, and knew that some neighbor had arrived in time to make an attempt at rescue; but the conflagration had evidently been discovered too late for any effective salvation. It was now not safe to stand within the fence.

Barbara said nothing. She stood just where her headlong arrival had landed her, and gazed at her burning home with all her Marshall soul in her eyes. William was almost frightened to see how like her father she looked. There was no mistaking, no doubting the desolation of her sorrow. She looked stricken, too, as if she were guiltily responsible. House and woman confronted each other for the last time, terribly in earnest.

"It is glad to go, isn't it?" William said, after a moment of thoughtful consideration of the situation. He spoke quietly, confidently, and slipped his hand under Barbara's arm.

She quivered a little, and he knew that he had succeeded in startling her from her fixed absorption. She even cast him a fleeting glance of inquiry.

"Why, of course!" he assured her. "It knows it is conquered; and, like the good sport that it is, it welcomes a thorough defeat. You and it have fought an equal fight. It has many times been so nearly the victor that it has nothing to be ashamed of. It has always done its best. Maybe it's tired now. I should think it might be, standing so doggedly for one thing during so many years. It certainly seems to find no

trouble at present in standing for wild change. Look out, there!" He pulled her back as an arm of flame shot out of one of the windows and swept across the yard. "It wanted to embrace you, didn't it? It loves you now; don't you feel that it loves you? You have proved yourself worthy of it, and it salutes you. If you had yielded to it, it would have scorned you to death."

Barbara still said nothing, as these broken but quiet sentences sounded in her ear. She continued to hold herself rigidly and gaze into the flames. But, little by little, she breathed more freely, and a softer light came into her eyes.

"Yes, and I love it, too," she murmured at last; "love it as never before. Oh, old house!"

She put out her hand as if to clasp some responsive fingers.

But just then William, watching, pulled her back, across the road, into the neighboring field, giving, at the same time, a warning cry; and, with a shout of victory, the roof of the homestead fell in. The flames sprang up higher than ever, the sparks flew far and wide, the old walls collapsed; and, half an hour later, the house was a glowing heap.

William and Barbara did not wait to watch the lingering process of dissolution. The soul of the homestead went out when the roof and walls fell; and, after that, there was no glory nor meaning in the spectacle. Other things grew insistent: the hovering forms of neighbors, eager yet afraid to speak their sympathy; the haggard face of poor Reuben,

glaring miserably at them; the pitiful, charred elm trees, and the garden—oh, the garden! they must get away from that. With a mutual movement of dread and repugnance they turned in the direction of William's home.

That something should be the matter here, too, was hardly a surprise to them, so incessant had been the revelations of this momentous day. The doctor's buggy stood by the gate, and two or three women were evidently busying themselves about the house. One of them saw William coming, and ran to meet him. Though, indeed, he gave her scant chance. With a white face and with eyes of the deepest alarm, he anticipated the most of her approach.

"What's the matter?" His voice rang out.

"It's your mother, William. She seems to have had some kind of a stroke. She must have got up to go to the fire. Leastways, Pete Maynard, the first man on the spot, saw her hiding behind the woodshed. She must have been there some time, for her hair is all full of cinders. She didn't get burned; no, not a bit; and she wasn't hurt anywhere. But I guess the shock was too much for her. She fell as soon as Pete spoke to her; and he and Joel Perkins had to carry her home. She's resting quietly now, but——"

The rest of this explanation was lost in the air behind William's back, as, closely followed by Barbara, he strode across his dooryard and into his house. A group of women gave way before him, and he stood by his mother's bed.

There was nothing distressing in the wan face, lying inert on the pillow; rather there was, for the first time, in it a suggestion of peace. Like the homestead, its bitter fight was over; it had been conquered, and in its defeat lay its supreme satisfaction. How it had struggled and suffered and fought, beating itself against the life which was always too much for it! Freedom and harmony had it at last; in spite of itself, it had ministered to them, and it was well content.

"Oh, mother! mother!"

William knelt down by the side of the bed and hid his head in his hands. Then, as he felt Barbara kneeling beside him, he freed one arm and put it around her, holding her close.

"You have completed our destiny, mother," he whispered into the unhearing ear before him, "and when you wake up in heaven, you will be very glad. I understand. I will keep the secret. Bless you, mother dear."

But his tears rained down on the counterpane, and he hid his face in his mother's shoulder and sobbed like a little child. Barbara drew away, and did not try to comfort him. She felt that this moment belonged wholly to the mother who might remember it by and by and cherish the thought of it through all eternity.

Two hours later, without opening her eyes or making any sign, Martha ceased to breathe.

That is really all there is to be said. Daniel left on the evening train. When William and Barbara

went to seek him in the afternoon, and Barbara said to him, "William and I love each other," he gazed at them in wide-eyed silence a moment; then a flashing light touched his face into a vivid smile, and he held out both hands to them, crying, "Why, so you do!"

"Haven't we all three been foolish?" Barbara went on, laughing. "But we understand one another now, and we are going to have good times together—the best of times. Are you going back to Italy? Well, William and I will meet you there—some time."

The vision of far seas and palaces, of fountains and ilex groves leaped into her eyes as she spoke. She clasped William's arm a little tighter, and drew a long breath.

But the summer dusk found her in her mother's garden, working among the broken plants. To her infinite comfort, she found that the havoc there was not nearly so serious as it had looked. Many flowers had escaped altogether, and were bravely lifting their heads among the ruins; almost all of them gave promise of recovery.

"See, there's an evening primrose. Oh, sweet!" Barbara murmured, as William came to find her. "And a whole bed of pansies. William, you know, they say that things grow lustily after a fire. Perhaps, next summer, the garden will be finer than ever."

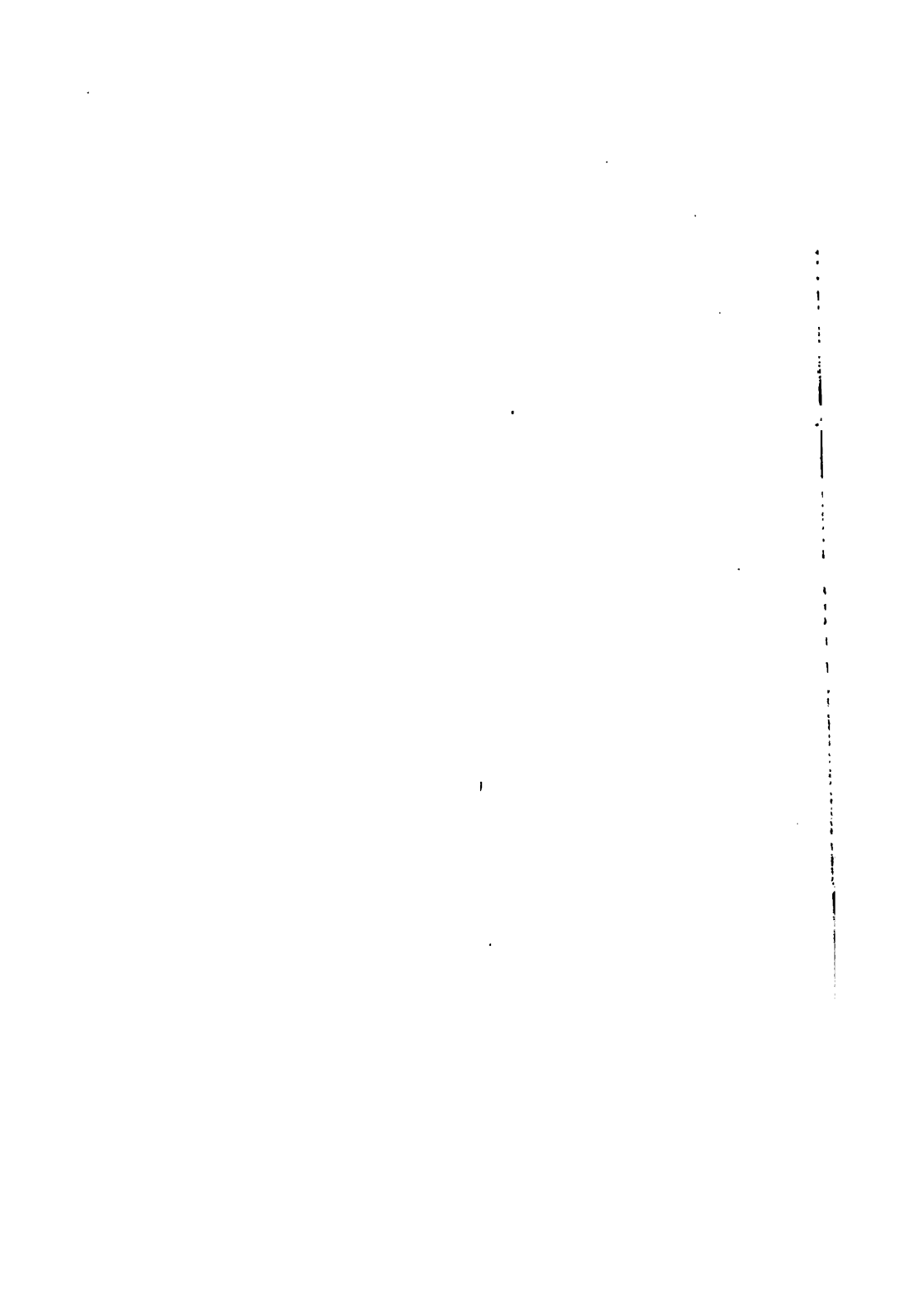
"I don't doubt it," he answered.

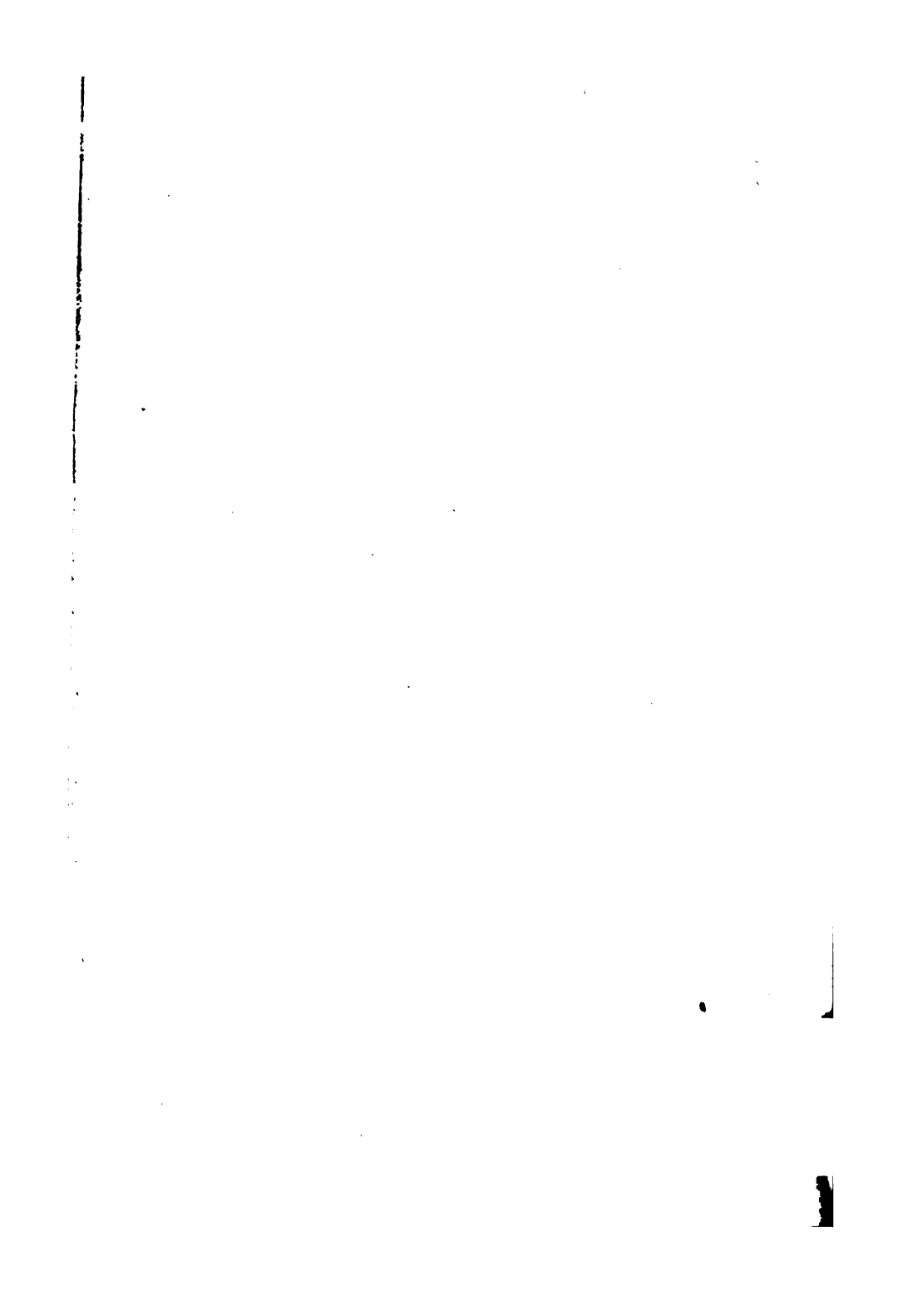
Then, hand in hand, they turned to the place where the house had stood, and their faces fell into thoughtful lines.

"Why shouldn't it have gone to be one of those

'many mansions' we read about?" Barbara reflected. "My father and mother would ask nothing better than to spend eternity in it."

THE END





**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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